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Our Lady's Inn

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

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Our Lady's Inn

BY

J. STORER CLOUSTON

AUTHOR OF 'THE LUNATIC AT LARGE,'
'THE ADVENTURES OF M. D'HARICOT,' ETC.

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OUR LADY'S INN.

CHAPTER I.

BARBARA RETURNS.

A TALE about a woman told by the crude pen of a man is always a little like a dissertation on music by one who is somewhat deaf, and not very richly endowed with melody. Either he is not technical enough or else smothers his theme under mountains of misleading explanation; either he talks like a man in love—and that is not very sensibly, people say; or as a cynic—and that is not very pleasantly, they complain. Why, then, should the feat be essayed now?

Because Heaven would chastise the presumption of another story-teller; that at least is the best reason that suggests itself.

The lady in question came one spring to live in a certain easterly part of Scotland; where the

winds blow very sharp from the North Sea; where tradition haunts ancient houses (now for a large part sold to more prosperous strangers) and little old towns inhabited by the most Scottish of the Scotch; where agriculture still thrives and forestry struggles; where abbeys crumble and kirks abound. Among the smaller country seats in this part of the world was an old house by the sea-coast belonging to an entirely respected and sometimes smiled-at lady, who referred not infrequently to her connection with an extinct peerage and a season she had once spent in London. But these were bygone glories, and for the last fifteen years Mrs Strynd of Fogo had been living in the comparative seclusion of Fogo House, devoting herself to the economical yet refined upbringing of her two daughters, the Misses Tilly and Rose Strynd. Consequently, when a penniless niece was also thrust by circumstances upon her, she made no secret of the fact that the arrangement reflected much credit upon her magnanimity and forbearance.

This was two years before our history begins, and the niece was Miss Barbara Cheyne. At first the arrangement, though magnanimous, was decidedly trying for both sides. Barbara was undoubtedly rather pretty—"at her best," the Strynds admitted—and she possessed a few

primitive virtues; but there their approbation ceased; while on her part she endured her aunt, disliked and rather feared Tilly, and rather liked but mistrusted Rose.

Six months passed, and then the visitor left almost as suddenly as she had come, but her departure took place amidst a display of affection and regard that considerably puzzled Miss Barbara. She was sensitive and she was shrewd, though, as will be seen later, not very experienced, and this wonderful change of sentiment became a greater mystery the longer she pondered over it.

"My niece has gone to complete her studies abroad," Mrs Strynd explained to her friends, and always added some expression of affectionate regret at losing such a charming girl.

Eighteen months went by, the few people who had met this niece almost forgot her existence and ceased to inquire for her; Tilly Strynd became so interested in the botanical studies she was pursuing under the direction of the Reverend Mr Sanderson, minister of the parish, and Rose so absorbed in the singing lessons she shared with the Misses Gil-liewie of Riggs (week about in either house), that they never discussed her once in nine weeks; the seasons came and went as usual, east winds alternating with glimpses of sun

and rain from the wet west. In short, there was nothing to record about Miss Cheyne.

At last, upon an April afternoon, a train from the south stopped at Rango station, and from a third-class carriage a girl descended upon the platform. She collected her luggage with a business-like air, smiled at the station-master so agreeably that in his own hands he bore her hat-box to a one-horse carriage standing in the road outside, presented the porter with the sum of one shilling, and drove off between the turnip-fields towards the distant sea.

"Yon's a bonny face," remarked the porter.

"It's better nor bonny,—there's spunk there tae," replied the station-master, still gazing after the carriage.

"She gied me a shull'n," added the porter, in a burst of confidence.

"She'll learn mair sense some day," said the station-master drily.

Meanwhile Barbara was jogging at an easy pace along the level dusty road.

"No one to meet me," she said to herself. "That's to save the horse, I suppose; a poor relation and her luggage are load enough. It's not much of an animal either—though quite good enough for Aunt Jane."

As this lady leant back in the carriage

making these reflections, and adjusting her hat and her hair after each time she had leaned back too far, her face became more and more set in an expression that can perhaps be best described by that good Scotch word "dour." It was a rather small pale face with firmly drawn dark eyebrows, grey eyes, a sensitive mouth, a resolute chin, a straight nose, and a pile of brown hair above and around it. At this moment it was unusual and decidedly pretty in spite of its cloudiness; then there came a smile and it turned beautiful. But the smile was only at a passing memory, and again the dourness descended.

"What does my dear aunt intend to do with me?" she thought. "Marry me, I suppose, and as quick as she can. But then she has to get rid of her own daughters first, and I expect she thinks I'd stand in the way. I'm not *plainer* than they are, anyhow. Well, she won't be bothered with me for long, so she needn't worry. I'm *not* going to marry, and I *am* going to do something."

But what was this young lady to do? A nurse, a governess, a lady-stewardess, and a typewriter were rejected in turn. Something in the artist or authoress line? That was certainly better,—the fame being greater, the profits more considerable, and the work pleas-

anter. Besides, she could draw, and—who knows?—she might be able to write.

“Anyhow,” she decided, “I am going to be independent—and as soon as possible.”

Having come to this wise decision, she looked out of the windows more attentively, and with the altered landscape her expression too began to change.

That part of Scotland is very bare and flat and wind-swept, with much ploughed land and few trees and little charm till you approach the coast. Barbara Cheyne did not even call it home, and her grey, inquisitive, changing eyes saw at first nothing to please them and lighten her humour. But now a shining pale-blue belt had come to terminate the country and make the light green of the young corn and the dark green of a pine plantation part of a delightful scheme. She drew a long breath and a smile began to settle about her lips. After all she was coming to the only home she had and the only near relations, and it was a sunny and cheerful afternoon, and the first sight of the sea has exhilarated many a heart since Xenophon.

“Aunt Jane can be quite decent when she likes,” she thought. “And Tilly isn’t bad—sometimes, and I really do like Rose, and I suppose it’s very kind of them to put up with

me—so long as they don't air that virtue; and if Aunt Jane did send me abroad at her own expense, why, then, I've judged her wrongly."

As Barbara prided herself on the accuracy of her estimates, this reflection gave her food for thought for the rest of her drive.

There was a mystery, she was sure. She stirred her memories, and they took her back to a grey and cold little town and a house that looked over this same North Sea; and money certainly was not plentiful there. Two years ago that home broke up, and she was an orphan and went to live with Aunt Jane; and certainly she brought no well-filled purse in her pocket.

"I never knew I'd a penny in the world," she said to herself in perplexity, "and my dear relations treated me accordingly; and then all of a sudden Aunt Jane began to beam and sent me abroad to learn languages and painting and music—'everything a girl of position ought to know,' she said. Somebody *must* have left me a legacy; but then why don't they tell me?"

She had never, in fact, been able to get an explanation of that extraordinary change of attitude. What did it mean? And would it last? These were the two questions she asked herself a hundred times; and as she drew near her destination she began to dwell more and more on the second of them.

The road was now running along the shore, and presently there appeared, a little way ahead, a very steep roof and a whitewashed gable rising above a clump of trees that bowed towards this mansion as though they were doing obeisance to it. In point of fact it was the sea wind that had pressed and pruned them to this angle, just as in winter it coated the windows with salt and in summer kept the air so fresh and bracing.

They turned through a white-painted gate, rumbled between a smooth lawn and bright flower-beds, and now this second question was about to be answered.

A stout, very erect lady, with a gracious smile and a light blue eye, met the traveller in the hall, and behind her two girls hurried from a morning room. Tilly, the elder of these, was about twenty-seven, Rose a little over twenty, and both smiled as cordially as their mother.

"My dear child!" cried Aunt Jane, embracing her niece and kissing her three or four times without, the young lady remarked in fresh surprise, any effort to scamp this operation.

"Dear Barbara!" said her cousins, repeating the same salutes with unquestionable fervour.

"And did you have a comfortable journey?" asked Aunt Jane.

"You *must* be ready for tea!" cried Tilly.

"How sweet you look in that coat, dear!" said Rose, kissing her cousin afresh.

Barbara's critical humour melted away completely before this welcome, and her warm heart went out to them like the child's it really was.

"What a brute I've been!" she said to herself penitently. "Of course they're glad to see me, just as I'd be to see them; just as I am, in fact!"

This new mood was so becoming to our traveller, her eyes were so bright, her smile played so constantly about her face, and her voice became so friendly and unguarded, that her aunt's air grew kinder still in sympathy.

"I believe she will be quite a success," she said to herself.

Indeed so far as looks went they all three had to admit that there was no doubt about the success already.

"You *have* improved in looks, Barbara," said Tilly candidly; and though this might have implied an insinuation that previously there was some room for improvement, Barbara blushed and laughed most becomingly at the compliment.

During tea there were all sorts of questions to be asked on both sides. On the Strynds', about her life abroad, what she had seen, studied, done, what people she had met, and all the

other things one asks a returned traveller. And then on Barbara's part there came inquiries about local matters. She had only been six months with her cousins before she went abroad, and a very unsatisfactory six months they had been up to that mysterious change, but she dutifully tried to ask for every one she could think of.

"And these are all the people you are interested in?" said Aunt Jane at last, smiling, as though she expected another question.

"I think so."

"You've forgotten Mr Clestran; and he is coming to lunch with us to-morrow."

"That is the old gentleman who came to call just before I went away?" said Barbara.

"*Old* gentleman!" exclaimed Mrs Strynd.

"Isn't he?" asked Barbara, moving towards the window with a smile at the view of the sea.

Mother and daughters glanced at one another.

"Little humbug!" said Rose to herself.

"You will be able to judge to-morrow," replied Aunt Jane. "But I am surprised at your forgetting such an old friend of ours; I'm sure I mentioned him in my letters."

"Yes, I believe you did," said Barbara candidly; "but I really had forgotten."

"I don't believe her," thought Rose, restrain-

ing herself with an effort, since for some reason or another these replies of her cousin, while they had a disconcerting effect on her mother and sister, roused her own indignation to the highest pitch. Any one else hearing them would have said they were made most artlessly, and evidently told the truth. But Miss Rose, apparently, had occult reasons for doubting this. She herself was not very simple, in spite of her innocent fair face, and she flattered herself that her eyes were uncommonly sharp in detecting duplicity in others, particularly in other women.

"Wait till I get her alone," she thought; and in a minute or two she had taken her cousin's arm and was conducting her up to her room.

"She is a dear child," said Aunt Jane when they had left. This remark was made in a tone that might have signified anything, and as if her own ideas rather wanted guidance.

"She is either a fool or uncommonly deep," replied Tilly with decision.

This young lady had a pair of keen black eyes and sharply cut pale features. She was generally accounted to have the brains, and Rose the looks.

"My dear, she is very young," said her mother.

"Absurdly," snapped Tilly. "I never heard

of such folly,"—though what precisely was folly she left to her mother's imagination.

Meanwhile Miss Rose had taken her cousin into an exceedingly spacious and pleasant bedroom, filled with a sweet odour of honeysuckle, and looking from its open window over the lawn and the trees out to the sparkling sea.

"The best bedroom—for me!" said Barbara to herself.

Aloud she exclaimed—

"Well, Rose, all I can say is that you are just a lot of dears!"

"We want you to be happy, dear, while you are with us," said Rose affectionately, and yet with a smile that seemed to have a hidden meaning.

"Do you intend to send me away soon?" laughed Barbara.

For reply Rose kissed her again.

"You lucky thing!" she cried.

"Do you mean because you've given me the best bedroom?"

This time Rose did not kiss her.

"Well," she said, "if you won't talk, I suppose you won't."

"About what?"

"Oh, you incorrigible!" exclaimed Rose lightly, though she could not quite conceal her annoyance.

"She *can't* be such a simpleton as not to have guessed!" she thought as she went downstairs.

Barbara was left leaning on the window-sill, drinking in whiffs of honeysuckle and vistas of ocean.

"They couldn't be kinder, and I ought to feel nothing but happiness," she thought. "No welcome could be warmer, no home could be nicer, and yet—— Am I a beast to think there's something going on that I don't understand? Yes, I'm sure there is something in the air! What is it?"

CHAPTER II.

PITTENTREWS.

About ten miles farther north along this same coast, the woods of Pittentrews broke the long bareness of the land. The house itself was a considerable and stately mansion, as became the residence of so important a personage as Mr Thomas Clestran of Pittentrews. If you entered the grounds (which you could only do by written permission of the proprietor), you would be struck at once by the immaculate order in which

everything was kept. An indefinable impression of symmetry seemed to pervade the very air. Even when the wind blew it appeared to blow in straight lines, and not in eddies.

"System is everything," Mr Clestran used to observe ; and it might be added that Mr Clestran was system itself. If you were to go further and come to the conclusion that Mr Clestran was everything, your logic would, I think, be justified, or at least Mr Clestran himself would not gainsay you. He was convener of the county, deputy lieutenant, colonel of volunteers (and was hence frequently known as "Colonel" Clestran), a magistrate, patron of everything in the county, a good shot, well-informed on every topic ; in short, his offices and accomplishments were innumerable, and it is only necessary to add that he was a widower.

"System is everything," he repeated at frequent intervals, and each year this phrase grew more wide-embracing, till by this time his plantations, his conservatories, his water-supply, his pheasant shoots, his servants, his library, and his tenantry had become models that even a von Roon might envy, and Mr Clestran himself as complete an autocrat as the Kaiser.

Upon the selfsame evening that Miss Barbara Cheyne arrived at her aunt's, the proprietor of Pittentrews sat in his library, with a single

friend, discoursing with erudition and finality on many topics ; yet always the conversation turned towards one particular subject, till at last it stayed there. Woman, that was this theme ; how to educate, treat, and generally deal with her.

“ You may take my word, Dunsappie,” said Mr Clestran, “ that the mistakes men make in dealing with women arise entirely from ignorance of the proper method. Help yourself to a cigar ; you will find these excellent. They are selected by myself, specially imported for me, and matured on a system of my own, which I will explain to-morrow if you’ll remind me.”

Sir Andrew Dunsappie, twelfth baronet and thirty-second laird of Ochil, stretched out a hand that perceptibly quivered in the light of Mr Clestran’s patent lamp, and took one of these remarkable cigars from a box specially designed to admit air while excluding draughts and damp. He was a thin, ramshackle-looking man, with a red beard, and a red freckled face whose colouring was becoming yearly more concentrated about the nose. His eyes were blue and pleasant, though perhaps a trifle watery, and his expression was entirely amiable.

“ What’s your proper method with women, Pittentrews ? ” he asked in a voice that was distinctly Scottish. “ I’m damned—or, begging

your pardon, hanged, or any past participle you like—if ever I found one.”

Mr Clestran laughed indulgently.

“I am afraid you never looked for one,” he replied.

“I’ve tried thirty, and they all led to the one thing,” said Sir Andrew. “Hullo! my glass is empty. That’s another trick I’ve never learned, how to keep liquor from leaking through this kind of glass.”

Smiling amiably at his own wit, the baronet made two slow and two hurried steps towards the table where the decanter stood, while his host watched him with a half critical, half indulgent eye.

Nothing could have been a greater contrast than these two men. Mr Clestran was tall, upright, and powerfully framed, carrying his fifty-five years as though they had been thirty; his face was handsome, and in repose resolute to the point of hardness:—heavy eyebrows, an aquiline nose, a piercing eye, and a clean-shaven jaw and upper lip, both surcharged with will and decision; though when he spoke the deliberate courtesy of his manner softened somewhat this stern impression. Why he should be so specially intimate with the none too reputable Dunsappie was a question often debated by his friends, and the answers suggested were various.

For one thing, they were neighbours; for another, distantly related, — and Mr Clestran was strong on his family connections, armorial bearings, alliances, and everything pertaining to the house of Clestran; for a third, the baronet, in spite of his shaky hand, was an excellent shot and good sportsman, and, despite all his weaknesses, a sound scholar and omnivorous reader; but probably the strongest was the admirable moral to be drawn at all times from the laird of Ochil. “Look at poor Dunsappie,” was such a frequent beginning to Mr Clestran’s homilies that it had passed into a by-word with some of his less reverential acquaintances; and then would follow a lucid exposition on the dangers of an ill-regulated life, and a number of axioms by which the listener might learn to avoid this lamentable example.

“Do you mean to say you’ve never made a mistake with a petticoat yourself?” said the baronet, seating himself so abruptly as to spill half his glass, and then painfully endeavouring to wipe from his coat a constellation of candle-grease under the impression it was whisky-and-water.

“‘The man who never makes a mistake never makes anything else,’” quoted his host. “But I may say confidently that each error of judgment I have made in my life has ensured

me against a similar error. With regard to women, the problem is ridiculously simple if one disabuses one's mind of preconceptions, and regards them in a modern scientific spirit."

"Like your new cistern?" suggested Sir Andrew, with a twinkle in his half-shut eye.

Mr Clestran was by no means devoid of humour, but it was a sense that left him when he was once embarked on a serious argument.

"Precisely," he said. "To both problems I have brought experience and common-sense. What is the result? A simple solution. I have no trouble now with my cistern, and I intend to have no trouble with my wife."

"Your what!" shouted the baronet, springing up in his chair.

"My wife," repeated Mr Clestran, smiling a little at the effect of this announcement. "Yes, my dear Dunsappie, I asked you to come over to-day that I might inform you of my approaching marriage."

"My dear fellow!" cried Sir Andrew, "I congratulate you! Er—by the way, who's the lady?"

"Miss Barbara Cheyne."

"What! Mrs Strynd's niece?"

"The same," said Mr Clestran, looking a trifle displeased at the manifest astonishment which greeted this announcement.

"Fine girl," said the amiable baronet hastily. "Never seen her myself, don't you know, but pretty and all that kind o' thing, of course, and —er——." Poor Dunsappie at this point found the difficulty of inventing eulogies for this unknown so great that he had again recourse to his tumbler.

"When is it to be?" he inquired after this refreshment.

"In a month."

"The devil!" exclaimed Dunsappie. "I mean, I'm devilish glad to hear it. Been engaged long?"

"I only become engaged to-morrow," replied Mr Clestran in the same measured and dignified voice.

The baronet stared at him and rose slowly to his feet.

"My head's getting muddled," he muttered, moving off to replenish his glass. "Need a drop more to clear it up."

Mr Clestran smiled a dignified smile.

"Miss Cheyne only returns to-day from abroad," he explained. "I intend to ask her to marry me to-morrow."

"Does she know you are going to?"

"I have been particularly careful to keep her in ignorance of my intention."

"By God!" muttered Sir Andrew, blinking

at his friend and endeavouring hard to grasp the full significance of these statements.

"It is nearly two years ago since I first saw Miss Cheyne at her aunt's house, where she had recently come to live," said Mr Clestran. "She was seventeen, unformed, unsophisticated, and unused to society. This, however, was to me an advantage, not a drawback. I perceived the possibilities in her character, and I was charmed with the unaffected dignity and other suitable maidenly qualities she exhibited. She is, besides, of a good family,—the Cheynes of Gowdenlinks, though of a younger branch. I said to myself that, taken at once and systematically educated, she would make an ideal wife. I approached her aunt and stated my wishes. I told her exactly what I desired to be done. I said to her, 'My dear Mrs Strynd, I am aware of your excellent heart and so forth, but this is a question of system and development along the proper lines. I wish your niece to be sent abroad and educated according to a schedule which I shall send you to-morrow. I prepared it some years ago with a view to such a contingency. I shall pay all her expenses, which I wish to be on the most liberal scale; but I particularly enjoin you to let no suspicion of my intentions or of this arrangement reach Miss Cheyne.'"

"In case you changed your mind?" said Dunsappie.

"Am I apt to change my mind?" asked Mr Clestran with some warmth. "No, Dunsappie, when I make an arrangement I carry it out. To understand my motives you would require some knowledge of woman. I shall explain to you."

"O Lord!" said Sir Andrew to himself. "He's off."

"Woman," his host pronounced, "is intended by nature to be the complement of man. Mark that; it is the key to the situation. By the complement to man, what do I mean? I mean this——"

But what exactly he meant the baronet never learned, for at that point his host's voice became first a confused noise and then faded gently away, and it might have been five minutes or it might have been half an hour later when he was awakened with a start by the emphatic peroration of this homily.

"Thus you will see that to disturb a young girl's mind during the period of her mental evolution by thoughts of love or matrimony would be just as fatal as to press the lever too soon in the analogous case I have instanced!"

"By God, you'd muck the whole thing if you

tried to kiss her," said the baronet, catching at what appeared to be the main idea and feeling round the legs of his chair for his tumbler.

Mr Clestran looked considerably startled at this reading of his argument.

"I say," his guest continued, rising unsteadily, "time we were off to litt'l beds, Tommy."

From long experience his friend knew that when he began to be addressed as Tommy it was prudent to curtail the sitting. In fact, "Clestran," "Pittentrews," and "Tommy" marked the stages of the transition from complete sobriety to something approaching the opposite.

"I think so too," he replied.

"Another wee drop first," suggested Sir Andrew.

"No," said Mr Clestran emphatically.

Dunsappie sighed, but, with an amiable air that showed he bore no malice, he grasped his host's hand and wrung it affectionately.

"Congratulations, old man," he said fervently; "hope you'll be happy as you deserve. Wish I'd some system myself: might have had a litt'l more money and been marrying a nice girl too."

"Poor Dunsappie," said Mr Clestran to himself with a kindly smile, as he turned out the patent lamp by simply pressing a patent

spring. "There goes an accomplished and good-hearted man ruined through want of firmness and method."

CHAPTER III.

MR CLESTRAN DRIVES TO FOGO.

"Tuts, Pittentrews, a man in your state of mind oughtn't to know the difference between kippered herrings and pease brose," said Sir Andrew, with a jocular twinkle in his eye.

They were seated at breakfast, and Mr Clestran had just ordered his disapprobation of the fish to be conveyed to his cook.

To this sally he replied with a glance of irritated apprehension towards his perfectly drilled butler, but seeing that the innuendo apparently passed unnoticed, he answered with a slightly constrained smile—

"I see no reason why I should eat badly-cooked food on this particular morning."

"There is none of my uncle's marks upon you; he taught me how to know a man in love," quoted his guest with a humorous smile.

"I wish to the devil, Dunsappie, you would wait till my servants have left the room before

you make these remarks," said Mr Clestran as the door closed behind the butler.

"Hoots toots!" smiled the baronet genially. "It was just a bit of chaff, just a bit of nonsense to cheer you up."

"I am not in low spirits."

"Not low, but kind of nervous; naturally enough, too, my dear fellow."

"When I have made up my mind to do a thing I am not generally troubled with nerves," said Mr Clestran shortly.

"But then you're not generally on the point of proposing, thank the Lord!" replied Dunsappie.

His host laughed.

"Hang it, Dunsappie, you'll make me think I am performing a dangerous operation!" he exclaimed.

"I've often inspired more foolish thoughts, Pittentrews," replied the baronet.

"Come now, don't play the philosopher this morning; can't have that," said his host, endeavouring to smile with his usual dignified geniality.

"Oh, you'd like me to whistle you 'Gin a laddie meet a lassie,' would you?" asked Sir Andrew, "or maybe tell you that tie sets you off remarkably?"

"I am neither a boy nor a fool," replied Mr

Clestran, with a sudden change to irritation again.

"But just a sensible man about to ask a simple question?" suggested Dunsappie.

Mr Clestran opened the morning paper.

"There seems to be no particular news to-day," he replied.

Sir Andrew perceived that he had jested enough.

"He's in a deuce of a fidget," he said to himself. "I wouldn't be in his shoes after all. I'd forgotten what a devil of a business it is—like the walk to the dentist's, by Gad!"

The sympathetic air he assumed in consequence of this reflection had a gradually softening effect upon his host.

"My dear Dunsappie," he said, as his guest departed for home, "we are old friends, you and I; wish me happiness."

"With all my heart!" replied the good-natured baronet. "The best of luck to you. May she recognise her good fortune and take you at the first time of asking!"

Mr Clestran looked a trifle disconcerted.

"I was hardly thinking of that," he said.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, of course, of course. She'll jump at you, that goes without saying. Well, I wish you everything you want,—twins within the year and all the rest of it. Good

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bye! Let me know what you'd like for a present."

It seemed to Mr Clestran that his old friend must have degenerated more than he was aware—this blessing was so singularly unsatisfactory. He pulled out his watch and looked at the time. The dog-cart was not ordered for half an hour yet, and even then he would have enough time to reach Fogo House for luncheon.

"Tell Davidson I want the trap at once," he said abruptly; and his butler's surprise at this deviation from the customary mathematical precision of Pittentrews was increased by seeing his master impatiently pace the hall in his ulster and gloves for at least five minutes before it was necessary to be ready. Something surely was seriously interfering with the system, for up till that moment not even the Count of Monte Cristo had timed his movements more exactly than the laird.

At a spanking trot he covered the ten miles to Fogo, up hill and down always at the same swift pace.

"Mare's getting a bit warm, sir," his groom ventured to suggest; but Mr Clestran apparently never even heard the remark.

Not for many years had he felt such an unsteadiness of nerve and such an unsystematic

preoccupation of thought. He told himself that he was merely carrying out a plan he had for long carefully considered and coolly decided upon, that in dealing with a woman nothing was so essential as a quiet firmness of purpose exhibited in a politely resolute manner, and that when reason gave way to feeling, folly seized her chance. But still the thoughts would wander and the heart beat a little faster than usual.

"Am I going to turn a fool at fifty-five?" he asked himself contemptuously.

At last the white gable appeared above the trees and the dog-cart rattled up the gravel drive. He hastily took out his watch, and his self-contempt increased. He was three quarters of an hour too early.

Mrs Strynd welcomed him with a smile in which he was annoyed to perceive her own explanation of his haste.

"I had forgotten how quickly one could come over," he said, with even more than his usual dignified courtesy.

"Ah, we expected you to be early!" she smiled, with much meaning.

Mr Clestran made no reply, but drawing himself up to his fullest height walked with extra deliberation towards the drawing-room.

As he entered he involuntarily paused.

There she was sitting by the window, her face turned towards him ready to smile, and he said to himself instantly—

“I have chosen well.”

He shook hands with her and with the Misses Strynd; he talked to the family generally as agreeably as ever; he found a great satisfaction in eliciting a remark now and then from the girl in the window; and it was not for a few minutes that he became conscious of the fact that the situation was a little unsatisfactory. He had come there for a purpose, and for the next two hours or so he saw no particular hope of accomplishing it. And all the time there were three spectators who were aware of his intentions, and who were watching him, he felt, with an interest that was almost impertinent. Had he realised this beforehand he would have made a better arrangement.

But Mrs Strynd fully grasped the situation. A few strategic movements left her guest and her niece together, her daughters unobtrusively withdrew, and she was about to find a pretext for following them, when, as she turned to excuse herself, Barbara quietly and with a smilingly unconscious air slipped out herself.

To tell the truth, Mr Clestran was not altogether displeased, for he had suddenly realised that a proposal may be considerably easier

to plan than to execute. Barbara had been entirely charming, no doubt, but so completely unconscious that she was talking to any one but a middle-aged friend of her aunt, to whom it was her duty to be polite so long as he addressed his remarks to her, that a sudden offer of marriage became, if not a dangerous, at least a highly difficult operation.

"My dear Mrs Strynd," he said with a smile, "I am afraid I must make another call upon your good-nature."

"You know I shall do anything to assist a lover."

"To assist an old friend to express his wishes—or I should rather say his hopes," he corrected. "It would make it easier, I think, if you would be kind enough to indicate to Miss Cheyne why I am here. Do it delicately, I beseech you, and in such a way that she may appreciate my motives in asking for a mediator. My motives, of course, are——"

"I know, I know, my dear Mr Clestran," she interrupted, glancing at the clock and remembering the amplitude of her guest's explanations. "I shall just be able to say a word to her before luncheon, so that she may have time to think it over first. *I* think you are very wise to ask me to."

To entertain their guest in the meantime,

Miss Rose was despatched back to the drawing-room, and he was provided with as sympathetic and admiring an audience for his well-expressed views on different topics as he could possibly have wished.

“To think of this man throwing himself away on Barbara!” she thought.

CHAPTER IV.

IN WHICH BARBARA LEARNS HER GOOD FORTUNE.

Totally unconscious of her unmerited good-fortune, with her thoughts wandering from the problem of her hair (which was a trifle refractory at times) all round the world and back again, Barbara stood before her mirror, gently pushing first one lock and then another into place. Her eyes on the whole seemed inclined to smile at what they saw reflected, and presently her lips gathered themselves up and softly whistled a few bars. This generally means that the world is using one tolerably well, and certainly her first twenty-four hours at Fogo had given Miss Barbara no cause for complaint.

“Aunt Jane has discovered something about me,” she thought; “either that I’m nicer than

she thought at first or else richer, or perhaps that I've some kind of expectations or something. They all treat me as though I was quite an important person instead of a poor and troublesome relation. I do wish, though, they'd tell me what they have discovered; I'd like to share in their high opinion."

She smiled at herself cheerfully, and surveyed the hair with complete satisfaction.

"I'm not altogether a fright," she reflected. "But of course *that* can't be the reason; in fact, it's rather against me than otherwise, I imagine. Aunts prefer 'em plain, as a rule—at least, in the cases I've known."

She paused, and a quick look of contrition came over her face.

"Oh, I am a little beast!" she exclaimed. "Just a monster of cynicism!"

At that moment there came a light tap on the door, and Aunt Jane entered in person. From the way she closed the door behind her, from her air of complacency and mystery, from the unexpected kiss with which she presented her niece, that young lady instantly concluded that some important communication was about to be made. But little did she guess what it was to be.

"My dear child, I have something to tell you," her aunt began with a beaming smile.

"Yes, Aunt Jane?" she answered with a very composed air, though her heart began to beat a little faster.

"Mr Clestran has asked me to."

"Mr Clestran!" cried Barbara, her eyes opening in perplexed astonishment.

"Yes, dear, he wished me to let you know that he is going to ask you to marry him."

Had she been informed that she was the rightful queen of England, the announcement could not have more utterly petrified Barbara. For a moment she was too staggered to speak, and when she did it was with a little nervous gasp, half laugh, half struggle for breath.

"Mr Clestran—marry *me*!"

"Yes, dear; and I need hardly say that I consider you one of the luckiest girls in Scotland!"

"But—but he doesn't know me," she began, and then stopped as a bewildering new idea came into her head.

"He met you two or three times before you went abroad, you remember."

"And told you, then?" exclaimed Barbara.

Aunt Jane hesitated for a moment. Mr Clestran was very peremptory in his injunctions, and she could not think whether she was allowed to answer this frankly.

"And that's why you sent me abroad?"

pursued Barbara, her eyes looking very straight at Mrs Strynd.

"My dear child, a lady in the position you will occupy requires every advantage she can get."

For a minute Barbara was silent.

"It was very good of you," she said at length, but with an air of constraint her aunt did not quite care for. "But——"

She hesitated; and before she could finish her sentence, Aunt Jane kissed her hastily, saying, "But now lunch is ready. He will speak to you afterwards," and left the room.

It was only as she went downstairs that she remembered Mr Clestran's injunctions to explain his motives.

"And I might have explained to her some of the advantages," she thought.

But Tilly, with whom she had a hasty consultation, laughed at the idea that either step was necessary.

"She will see the advantages herself quick enough!" she assured her mother. "And she won't worry about the motives."

Tilly, as I have said, was generally credited with brains, so that Mrs Strynd had no hesitation in accepting this as an authoritative estimate, and the slight disquietude she had felt at her niece's reception of the news passed away.

Still, she could not but think that the more maidenly course, the course she herself would have pursued under similar circumstances, would have been to evince both more pleasure and more gratitude.

In the meantime the fortunate niece was sitting in her room trying hard to realise that she was not in a dream but upon the verge of the great crisis in her life. The gong had to be sounded twice before she roused herself to go downstairs, though when she did appear at last there was no sign of any disturbance beyond a little more colour in her face and now and then a slightly absent-minded answer.

But beneath this outward coolness was a whirl of feelings like drifting snowflakes in a gale, and though the mind might be absent it was very far from asleep. Carefully as she avoided Mr Clestran's eye, she noted him feature by feature, gesture by gesture; how he smiled, into what lines his face set again, every intonation, each trick of manner. It became so fascinating simply noticing these things that she had to keep reminding herself, "This man wants to marry me; let me judge him quickly before it is too late." She tried to think of what it all meant—Twelve thousand a-year (Mrs Strynd had let this fall casually last night), one of the greatest positions in the county,

no more poverty, no more hurts to her pride and slights fancied or real. The lines of an old song began to run in her head :—

“And jewels so rare
He will twine in my hair,
And a lady I'll surely be!”

And then came the refrain :—

“But oh, where will my heart be?”

“Have I a heart?” she wondered. “I don't feel like it at present; I feel more like choosing a hat.”

And then for a time nothing but the humorous side of the situation would present itself, protest against it as she liked. “I can't order a new one if I once take this,” she kept on thinking, feeling all the time more ashamed of her levity.

She spoke so little, and these unseemly thoughts would so insist on displaying themselves in her grey eyes, that her cousins' estimates of her became more critical the longer they sat at table.

“She has no ideas whatever,” thought Tilly, while to Rose the notion of a humble girl like that having frivolous thoughts in connection with an offer from Mr Clestran was absolutely indecent. It may be mentioned in these ladies'

defence that during the six months she had previously lived at Fogo, Barbara had either not known how, or been at no pains, to show herself to any particular advantage, and had chiefly exercised her wit in retaliating upon what she considered their patronage, so that they had perhaps some excuse for considering her a girl lucky beyond her deserts.

Their guest, however, took no such critical view. Indeed, the longer he sat the more he admired the prospect on the other side of the table, and watched to see what change of expression would pass next across that fair silent face.

At last the moment came to rise, and all at once, with a wild, half-excited, half-despairing flutter, Barbara realised that time was all but up and she must face the decision.

"Oh, for some one to advise me!" she cried to herself.

But there was no one but Barbara Cheyne.

Swiftly, with the swiftness of a waterfall it seemed to her, the crisis rushed to meet her. A few minutes, in the drawing-room, a suggestion that their guest might wish to see the garden, the provision of herself as his only escort; and there she was alone with him amidst the shrubbery.

As they walked slowly together from the front door, she had been conscious that he

was talking in an easy friendly way that fortunately required little answering. Then he became silent, and now he stopped before her, and with a smile that struck her as very pleasant upon his stern-looking features, said—

“Miss Cheyne, I believe your aunt has told you why I have come over here to-day?”

He paused for a reply, and, in a tone which her critical taste instantly pronounced absurdly tremulous and low, she answered, “Yes.”

“No doubt to you it is a somewhat sudden and surprising thing,” he went on, “but I assure you, my dear Barbara—I may call you so?—I assure you that I have carefully considered the question, and my mind has been quite made up for more than eighteen months now. I wish to ask you to marry me.”

“You are very——” began Barbara, and then found herself pausing between “good” and “kind,” and disliking both adjectives.

“You would say ‘rash’?” he suggested with a smile.

“No,” she said; “or rather,” she corrected herself, “it is extremely rash. You don’t know me a bit.”

“That will speedily be remedied.”

“When it is too late.”

“I am willing to take my chance,” he replied.

“But I don’t know you,” said Barbara.

Mr Clestran looked a trifle disconcerted. Somehow or other this point of view had not occurred to him before.

"For my character, I think I can safely refer you to Mrs Strynd—or to any of my other neighbours," he said with dignity.

"I should sooner judge for myself," she replied a little tartly.

He looked somewhat at a loss what to reply to this. It was an absurd objection, of course, but at the same time he ought to have anticipated the question—exactly how he did not at the moment consider.

"Have you any objections to me?" he asked after a minute's consideration.

"No," said Barbara; "only I don't know you."

"You know me as well as I know you. Believe me, Barbara, I have carefully considered the matter: I have not entered on it rashly. I have thought of your position as well as mine, and I can see no reasonable objection whatever. Of course you are young, but you will grow older every day; you are inexperienced, but experience you will be continually gaining. I, on the other hand, am considerably older than you are; I am fifty-five, to be accurate. But it is my experience that many of the happiest marriages are made when

the bridegroom has reached that time of life ; his wife can then safely lean on his judgment and authority, and confide her affection to him with a full assurance that it is in safe keeping."

Nothing could have been more convincing than the tone in which he set forth these arguments, yet no light of affection sprang into Barbara's eyes, nor did her attitude show any immediate desire to lean upon him.

He began to feel a little irritated that these symptoms should take so long in developing.

"Can you not trust my judgment when I assure you that it is so?" he demanded.

"But—I'm not in love with you," she said.

"That will come in time. I can give you the most absolute assurance upon that point."

"How do you know?" she asked.

"It would take too long to explain to you fully my grounds for saying so, and you must be content to accept my word that it is in the nature of woman to attach herself to the man she marries, provided always he is a suitable person ; and I do not think you have as yet advanced any reasons for holding me unsuitable."

He spoke with a slight air of asperity, as though he had been trifled with long enough. Yet on second thoughts it struck him that it was only just to set forth briefly the practical

advantages she would gain by this alliance ; and this he proceeded to do, enumerating the points he considered should appeal to a sensible woman. At the end of this he again assumed his grave smile and said—

“I should now like you to give me your answer.”

“I certainly shall not promise to marry you to-day.”

His brows darkened and his face set ominously.

“Do you think I have no mind of my own to make up?” she demanded.

Mr Clestran was a just man, and he could not but see that there was at least a show of reason in this.

“Very well,” he replied. “I shall return to-morrow for your answer.”

“To-morrow is far too soon!” she exclaimed.

“I shall return to-morrow,” he repeated decisively. “In the meantime, may I beg you to consult your aunt. A sensible opinion from one of your own sex will, I am certain, be of value to you.”

With an air of finally ending the discussion, he turned with her and walked back to the house.

“This is an excellently laid-out garden,” he remarked as they returned, but a little to his displeasure he received no reply whatever.

CHAPTER V.

GENTLE PERSUASION.

The high dog-cart with its tall dignified driver and spick-and-span groom had just swept out of the gate and was rattling back to Pittentrews. Mrs Strynd, with her niece and her two exceedingly curious daughters, still stood in the hall where they had watched their guest's departure. At a sign from their mother the daughters passed into the drawing-room.

"I should like to speak to you for a few minutes, Barbara," said Mrs Strynd.

"About Mr Clestran?"

"Yes."

"I should sooner think it over by myself first," said Barbara, and, with what her aunt could not but think scant enough courtesy, considering that aunt's efforts on her behalf, she went hurriedly up to her room.

"Well?" cried Rose, as her mother entered the drawing-room, and Tilly's eyes expressed as much desire for news. An engagement did not take place in Fogo House every day.

Mrs Strynd ignored the question altogether.

"She hasn't refused him!" exclaimed Rose.

"I think," said her mother, "that it would show more delicacy of feeling not to discuss such a matter till it is settled."

"Then you have no announcement to make?" asked Tilly.

"Not yet," replied Mrs Strynd.

Tilly laughed, and this struck her mother as exhibiting, if possible, even less delicacy of sentiment.

"I do not quite see the joke," she observed.

"My dear mother, I am laughing at the idea of your worrying."

"You do not know that girl's obstinacy and waywardness," said Mrs Strynd.

"We shall see who knows best," smiled Tilly, "after you have had your talk with her, mother."

"I cannot *force* the child to do what is right."

"No, dear mamma; but you might persuade her not to do wrong," said Tilly in a gentle voice, yet with an unpleasant suspicion of irony that made poor Mrs Strynd feel that the whole civilised world was conspiring to inflict pain upon her.

It was not till evening that aunt and niece met to have that sensible talk suggested by Mr Clestran. Standing in the lamplight by the fire, Barbara raised her chin and from

beneath her straight dark lines of eyebrow looked direct and boldly at her aunt.

"I have made up my mind so far," she said. "I shall *not* accept Mr Clestran to-morrow."

"You then mean definitely to refuse this offer?" asked Mrs Strynd, keeping her temper with a little difficulty.

"I certainly don't mean to marry him on two days' acquaintance. The idea is ridiculous! Surely, Aunt Jane, you must see that yourself."

"But he insists upon having his answer to-morrow."

"He shall get it, then."

Mrs Strynd could stand upon ceremony no longer.

"Do you mean to tell me," she demanded, "that you, a penniless girl dependent upon your relations, are going to reject an offer which any one in their senses would accept, even though their position gave them some right to be independent?"

Barbara visibly winced, as though a heavy fist had struck her, and all the pride suddenly left her attitude.

"Am I—*quite* penniless?" she asked.

"You seem unaware of your precise position," said her aunt relentlessly. "I shall be doing the kindest thing by telling you at once what it is."

She then proceeded to do the kindest thing; and if it was not done in quite the kindest way, such unparalleled folly surely excused drastic treatment. Without any unnecessary circumlocution, Barbara was enlightened on several points. She learned that her father had left nothing but an Indian pension, which on her mother's death had ceased altogether; that when she became an orphan this kind Aunt Jane, in deference only to her dying sister's request, had given her shelter gratis and without hope of reward in this world; and that, in a word, she was just a helpless dependent upon that good lady's bounty, her sole riches consisting of twenty pounds left over after settling her mother's affairs.

"But," cried Barbara, through the tears she tried to stifle, "why didn't you tell me at once? Why did you send me abroad and treat me as though I was somebody instead of a miserable nobody? Why didn't you give me a chance of making my own way?"

"You foolish child, I gave you such a chance as few girls ever get."

"Marrying an old man who tells me to trust his judgment and accept him instantly! That was my best chance, was it?" exclaimed Barbara bitterly.

"What objection do you make, may I ask?"

said Mrs Strynd, who thought she might now argue the main point.

"I don't love him, and I am not sure that I even like him."

"You ought at least to feel some gratitude for what he has done for you," said Mrs Strynd.

"Ordering me to marry him?" asked Barbara sarcastically.

Mrs Strynd looked at her niece with an expression that meant she was about to finish the battle. She had obtained Mr Clestran's permission to use her own discretion in dealing with the refractory young lady.

"It was Mr Clestran who sent you abroad and has paid for every penny of your education and your allowance."

She paused, and then, in a tone of righteous indignation, asked—

"Is that the way you should speak of such a friend?"

"*He* sent me?" gasped Barbara.

"He is the kindest and the best of men," said her aunt.

"But—I never asked him—I never wanted him to!"

"My dear child, think it over quietly."

Mrs Strynd leaned back in her chair, conscious of having produced, if not exactly the

impression she would have wished, at least a strong and vivid one. And Barbara thought it over, quietly outwardly, but raging within like a snared bird.

Presently, and in a reasonable kindly tone, Mrs Strynd went on to enlarge upon the theme of Mr Clestran's kindness, high worth, income, and position, and by implication hinted more than once at the lack of all other alternatives,—save bare boards where she might find them.

The hour was late before they separated, and it was a very subdued and silent niece who went to that best bedroom which yesterday had seemed to give her so honourable a welcome.

"It is rather hard," she said to herself, "to think that the fatted calf is being killed for me, and then find I'm the fatted calf myself!"

She had spirit enough left to give a humorous edge to this one reflection, and then it seemed to flicker out and she was only conscious of feeling deserted—deserted both by her friends and by her fancies.

Then gradually into the void began to come the new thoughts suggested by her aunt. She pondered long.

"Is there really nothing else for it?" she

asked herself; but by this time she was so worn out and weary that she left the answer till the morning, and, in a little, sleep, that old and gentle friend, came back to help her. The dirge of the North Sea on the beach and the sighing of the wind among the trees sounded muffled and mournfully in her ears, and then they died away, and she next heard them when the morning sun was streaming cheerfully through her window.

With a start her wits awoke to their dilemma. Twelve thousand a-year, a great landowner, and independence were to be offered her for the last time to-day. And what should she have to sacrifice? An unknown quantity of sentiment, of whose very presence she was only half aware and which as yet was attached to nothing. These were not exactly the words in which she put it to herself, and perhaps I am expressing it unfeelingly, but that was roughly the equation. Throw in the bleak prospect of the alternative, her nineteen years of youth, and the pungent talking-to last night, and it would be a bold gambler who would risk much against the chances of Thomas Clestran of Pittentrews.

CHAPTER VI.

DUNSAPPIE THE PHILOSOPHER.

"We are all so glad, for your sake, my dear child," said Mrs Strynd.

"You *are* a lucky girl, Barbara!" cried Rose. Barbara smiled.

"Don't you think he is at all lucky?"

"Of course," said her aunt. "I am certain my niece will do every credit to her husband and her position. We are delighted for both your sakes."

The high dog-cart was again on the way back to Pittentrews, but this time with a complacent and cheerful driver. For the deed was done, and Miss Barbara Cheyne had promised to become Mrs Clestran within some reasonably short space of time.

"When does the wedding come off?" asked Rose, "or haven't you got as far as that?"

"No time is settled yet," said Barbara, though she had a secret misgiving that her betrothed had alarmingly abrupt notions of an engagement.

"You will have a good deal to do," remarked Tilly, "before you are ready to be Lady Pittentrews."

Even this observation, though it contained her cousin's customary spice of acidity, was not without its gratifying side. That old Scotch designation had a fine wide-acred sound. The Lady of the barony of Pittentrews would be a personage; a personage—Barbara reflected without any sense of displeasure—considerably more important than either of the Misses Strynd.

Yes, it was difficult to believe at this moment that she could have made a mistake. Aunt Jane was beaming with affection, reflected pride in such an alliance, and satisfaction at her own share in managing it so happily. Rose manifested the first two of these sentiments, together with a frank envy of her cousin's good fortune.

"If he'd asked *me*, I shouldn't have hesitated!" she said in a moment of candid enthusiasm. "He's quite a dear!"

Even Tilly, though cynicism was her *rôle* and rapture her abhorrence, could not conceal the fact that she was a little impressed with the notion of Mrs Clestran of Pittentrews. Surely she must be very fortunate indeed to have raised such a chorus of approval. And then the talk quickly turned to the trousseau and the presents, and where the wedding was to be held, and all manner of absorbing and exciting things. So that for the time all other aspects of the case passed almost out of Barbara's mind.

Even when she found herself alone and began again to think, she was pleased, and a little surprised, to find that her heart kept so cheerful as practically to be called quite happy. He had met her with an air of courtesy and consideration that soothed her pride and made her a little penitent of her indignant thoughts; when he saw that her mood had changed, he became actually delightful; and then at last she had said "yes," and then—he had kissed her, not rapturously, but she thought affectionately. And if she had not been transported by this salute, she was relieved and pleased to remember that she had not at all disliked it.

"And I suppose that is a test," she said to herself.

With the true "eyes-front" determination of an honest woman who has pledged herself, she forthwith made up her mind to banish every rebellious thought and begin to-day to love the man she was going to marry. If he had faults she would close her eyes, if he had virtues she would keep them very wide open. Two dozen little vows at least she made there and then, and when she joined her cousins she wore an air of serenity that surprised them and impressed them more than ever. Already, they felt, she bore herself like the lady of the manor.

In the meantime the successful lover was covering the white road at a fine, sharp, inspiring pace, with a feeling within of deep and serious satisfaction. His plans had not miscarried after all. Looking back coolly, it was absurd to think a scheme of his could go otherwise than well, but for a whole day he had actually felt doubtful, and now the certainty of success put him in a better humour than ever.

"She is—or will be—everything that I can desire," he said to himself.

No more empty rooms, inhabited only when he had a shooting-party, no more solitary evenings when he lacked an audience for his illuminating ideas, no more hours with no sympathetic companion to soothe his leisure. He would now be entirely happy. And surely, it is to be supposed, a woman who had the privilege of filling such a void must share this emotion. At anyrate he never doubted it for an instant.

Suddenly it struck him that his present pleasure was a thing to be shared with a friend, and as he happened to be then within a couple of miles of Ochil Castle, he thought he would pay a passing call upon its owner. So he turned up a side road, and had covered about half the distance when he perceived two figures standing by a gate that led out of a field, and one of these he recognised as the baronet himself.

The road rose so steeply just there that his horse fell to a walk, and owing to this and to the absorbing nature of their conversation, Mr Clestran pulled up beside the pair, and stood there for a minute before his presence was perceived.

"Hoots! tuts!" Sir Andrew was saying. "It's just new gates and barns and dykes from one year's end to the other."

"Hoo mony gates or barns or dykes hae ye gie'n me these last sax years?" asked the other, a stout farmer with a hard freckled face. "When I cam to this fairm it was clearly understood——"

"Oh, damn it!" interrupted Dunsappie. "You seem to think my pockets are full of sovereigns. Holes, man, holes, that's all that's in my pockets. It's just a fine gate, this; and if it wasn't, I couldn't afford a new one."

"Gate!" cried the other. "Ye ca' this a gate? Jist fower rotten sticks and twa or three rusty nails! Look at it, Sir Andra; look at it!"

The baronet, whose mismanagement of his estate was a constant theme with his friend Pittentrews, inspected the gate with an unruffled smile.

"I tell you what I'll do," he suggested. "I've as fine a keg of old whisky just opened

as you ever tasted in your life. Come along to the house and have something to warm you up. It's damned cold for April."

"An excellent idea, Dunsappie," cried Mr Clestran, who was aware from the baronet's own candid confessions that this was his usual solution for agricultural problems. "I'll come as far as the house with you myself."

Sir Andrew turned with an exclamation at this unexpected interruption, while his tenant respectfully raised his cap, for the laird of Pittentrews was a much respected man far and near.

"My dear Clestran, delighted to see you," said the baronet. And then to the other, "Well, well, here's Mr Clestran come to see me on business; we'll have a crack about the gate some other day. Good-day to you."

And the unfortunate farmer was left without either refreshment or redress.

Mr Clestran got out of his trap.

"I'll just walk with you for half a mile," he said. "I thought perhaps you might like to hear my news."

"My dear fellow, I guess them already from your face. Taken you, eh?"

"Yes, my dear Dunsappie; Miss Cheyne has promised to marry me, and I am an exceedingly happy man."

Sir Andrew wrung his hand.

"Congratulations!" he said. "By Gad, it's queer to think of you marrying again, Clestran."

The "again" slightly jarred upon the happy lover. His first experience of married life had been short and not perfectly successful. Not that anything had appeared above the surface; but in his heart he considered it as one of his few errors of judgment, and, like the others, only to be recalled for purposes of self-instruction.

Sir Andrew's next remark was decidedly more happy.

"She's a devilish lucky girl," he observed.

"I can offer her some advantages," Mr Clestran admitted.

"She's clever, of course," said Sir Andrew. "You'd never have chosen her otherwise."

"She is bright, intelligent, and full of possibilities, and those, I consider, are more valuable qualifications than the tricks of a merely sophisticated society woman."

"By God, Clestran, if you married one of these new half-dressed women, with a stink of tobacco and a taste for queer stories, I'd never come near you again!" exclaimed Sir Andrew devoutly. "Give me the old-fashioned, mustard poultice, home-made cherry-brandy sort! That's to say as a wife, you understand."

"I agree with you so far," said Mr Clestran;

"but, on the other hand, I wish my wife to be a companion to me, intellectually as well as otherwise."

"Otherwise is most important, my dear fellow."

"Both are important," said Mr Clestran with emphasis; and then, warming to the argument, he proceeded to set forth the lines of the mould into which he proposed to run his chosen companion. "A woman ought to be capable of taking part in a conversation on any topic likely to arise,—politics, for instance, literature, art, social questions, and so forth. I don't say that she need necessarily offer opinions on all these subjects, but she should be able to listen intelligently and sympathise with one's ideas. To do this she must have read fairly extensively and with interest and enthusiasm. The subjects most properly within a woman's province I should leave to her, of course, for it is merely an unnecessary expenditure of energy if two people do the same thing. At the same time, I shall supervise things at first. I don't think this is asking too much from a woman, Dunsappie?"

"Not if she's all you picture her, my dear man," said the baronet, with his customary ready assent to anything that was suggested to him.

"She is a charming girl, a charming girl, sir!" exclaimed Mr Clestran, with such en-

thusiastic conviction that a look of amused surprise came into his friend's facile blue eyes. "I think, Dunsappie, she is fond of me already. She would do anything I assured her my judgment recommended."

"No difficulty in breaking her in, then?" suggested Sir Andrew, with his air of pawky humour returning.

Mr Clestran frowned.

"You scarcely sympathise with the delicacy of a woman's feelings, I am afraid," he replied with some severity.

"That's always been the deuce,—I'm afraid I don't," Sir Andrew admitted cheerfully.

He rambled along by his friend's side for a few minutes in silence, feeling for his tobacco in all the pockets of his loose threadbare shooting coat, and discovering with a sigh that he had left it at home. Apparently he was also reflecting on something else, for at last, with an apologetic air, he said—

"I say, Clestran, old man, you won't mind my saying so, but men of our age do get a little out of touch with girls of nineteen. You'll have to be careful, my dear fellow; you'll have to be careful. Don't ask for too much at first, don't you know."

Mr Clestran stopped and laughed.

"Come now," he said, "if you're going to

air these theories on a lover, I'm off. I'll remember your advice, though. Ha! ha! Good-bye."

Sir Andrew looked after him with a curious mixture of expressions on his kindly, shrewd, weak face.

"Air theories!" he said to himself.

"Oh, wad some power the giftie gie us
To see oursel's as ithers see us!"

Fine fellow, Clestran; lucky dog; but I hope he doesn't make a muck of this business. He'll talk the hind-leg off a donkey and then leather the beast for going lame. Gad, I always feel deuced thirsty myself after listening to him."

This, however, he reflected with some satisfaction as he hastened his steps homewards, was a curable complaint.

"But matrimony isn't, — that's the devil!" he thought.

CHAPTER VII.

A FORTUNATE *FIANCÉE*.

Upon the next morning the four ladies at Fogo set out in that same one-horse carriage to spend the day at Pittentrews. Barbara was quiet, but looked composed and contented with her lot, as such a fortunate girl ought. Her aunt was more radiant than ever, and her cousins vivacious and talkative all the way.

"You will find it a most completely appointed house, my dear," said Aunt Jane. "I scarcely think you will require to get anything more in the way of furniture or fittings; nothing indeed except your clothes."

Barbara smiled a little, but answered nothing.

"And I daresay Mr Clestran will choose those for her," suggested Tilly, with a bite in her words under a dulcet voice.

Still Barbara smiled pleasantly and held her peace.

"A penny for your thoughts, Barbara," said Rose. "You've said nothing now for three miles."

"You can keep your pence," she answered; "my thoughts are not very interesting."

"You must offer her a sovereign nowadays," said Tilly.

"Or else mind your own——" began Barbara ; but she stopped short with a shrug of her shoulders, while her aunt, after an apprehensive shudder, rebuked Tilly with her eye.

Barbara's thoughts that morning were certainly not for her cousins, or any one else. Indeed they could scarcely be expressed at all, they came so thick and fast and changed and melted into one another so swiftly. She would have liked to drive for fifty miles instead of ten, that they might have a chance of falling into some sort of order before the journey ended.

But now they had passed through the lodge gates of Pittentrews, and she must just collect a few and prepare to play the part of charming *fiancée*. On either side of them ran a belt of trees, and beyond these she could see the broad acres of the home farm, for after the economical Scottish custom there was little land wasted round the avenue in ornamental park. But as they approached closer to the house they entered upon a different domain. Here there were smooth lawns, and flower-beds bright with early flowers, and clipped hedges of evergreen, and a small forest of high limes and beeches and larches and firs, standing singly to shade the gardens, or gathered into glades where

an undergrowth of rhododendron sheltered the rabbits and the pheasants. Beneath an arch formed by two gigantic limes they passed out before the house itself, a mansion of modern date but baronially towered and turretted in a most imposing fashion, and large enough, Barbara thought, to hold herself and all the possessions and all the friends she was ever likely to have. And she was really to be the mistress of all this!

There may be ethereal minds to whom things material, be they never so splendid, are but sticks and stones and nothing else. Yet one seems to have read of some mortification of the flesh as necessary to purge the souls of even the most naturally austere: and this heroine of ours was a very mortal maid, and keenly felt the impress of a stately spectacle. Mr Clestran became none the less acceptable on account of his home, and she herself all the more inclined to smile.

He received his guests with his most courteous and charming air; and when he chose he could throw an undeniable charm into his dignified manner. The chief guest, towards whom his glance most frequently turned and his words were directed, the guest with the grey smiling eyes beneath her most becoming and coquettish hat, thought him more attractive by far than

Acce 15

she had remembered. Indeed she began to wonder why she had taken such offence with him at first. Yet as they went from one room to another, all five of them together, she was perfectly satisfied to have a chaperone and two spectators in addition to this polite and instructive lover. A *tête-à-tête* never struck her as a necessary condiment to courtship.

Mr Clestran, on the other hand, had entirely different views. The more he looked at her the more he liked her, and the less he felt himself the perfectly self-contained and sensible philosopher who had for so long inhabited this house in solitary state. And, strangely enough, he also felt no displeasure at the discovery of this irregular mood suddenly disturbing the even tenor of his way. In a very short time the chief question came to be, how to get rid of the three superfluous visitors.

"Perhaps you would like to come up and see the view from the tower," he suggested, with a flash of diplomacy that struck him as singularly happy.

And Barbara alone went with him.

Near the top he paused before a window, remarking that the view was worth stopping to admire. This proceeding struck Barbara as a little superfluous, considering that another flight of steps would bring them to the parapet

itself. She had observed too that his conversation had been less fluent than usual since they left the others, and she had charitably attributed it to the steepness of the ascent, but suddenly these phenomena had a surprising explanation. She felt his arm round her waist, she heard his voice say tenderly in her ear, "My little darling!" and then, before she knew what to think or do, she found herself so firmly embraced that all choice of action was gone. She could but stand still and struggle for breath.

But it was a very flushed face and incensed eye that met her lover's amorous glance when he released her.

"How dare you!" she exclaimed.

Poor Mr Clestran's face first fell and then hardened.

"Have I not the right?" he asked.

Then for the first time it struck her that perhaps he had; and this new point of view, while it softened the eye, only deepened the blush and changed her anger into aloof confusion.

"Let us come up to the top," she said after a moment's silence, and without another word on either side up to the top they went.

The latent undrilled and warmer part of Thomas Clestran shrank before this rebuff, till it had shrunk clean away and left only the positive disciplinarian. He felt heartily ashamed

of himself for having thus succumbed to that untoward impulse, and sternly resolved never again to do so foolish a thing till he had made her his own possession entirely, when according to every theory she would dutifully welcome his embraces. In the meantime he proposed to be philosopher, friend, and guide. To fulfil these functions in a gentle elder-brotherly way was what he intended, but unfortunately he was feeling a little too stung to infuse quite enough geniality into his excellent maxims and instructive comments ; so that Barbara's growing penitence for her hardness stopped growing, and then died away instead.

From the parapet of the tower she looked down on the tree-tops just beginning to turn a tender green, and through them to close turf and carefully tended paths. Over the trees she saw, on three sides, the wide lands of the barony of Pittentrews, and on the fourth the pale spring-blue North Sea. This was a prospect fair enough to make a young heart light, especially if all the land in it was going to hail the heart's owner as mistress. And then, when they descended again, everything in the house seemed chosen to charm and delight her and flatter her fancy. She was greatly impressed, too, with her lover's intellect and knowledge, and felt quite sure that he must be one of the wisest

and cleverest men in Scotland. Everything he said seemed so final and unanswerable that there was really nothing to reply to it. For every subject he had a theory, founded on perfectly marshalled facts, and grown by constant repetition to acquiescent audiences into a fluent authoritative summary, which surely no one but an ignorant wrangler would dream of disputing. No wonder Barbara felt that she was at the very fountain of knowledge.

And yet—and yet—she had a slight and very ungrateful sense of irritation that would keep cropping up just when she was most anxious to feel amiable. He seemed to talk to her just a little too authoritatively, and, when he expressed his wishes, to take it too much for granted that they would assuredly be executed,—rather as though he were an oriental sultan, she said to herself once. Two minutes later she was upbraiding herself for such an unkind thought; but a thought, though its passage be as swift as light and its place filled instantly by the most opposite reflections, yet inevitably leaves a minute tracing among the myriad lines whose patterns make memory.

“A short course of Herbert Spencer and Mill must certainly be undertaken before long,” he said, as he took her round the library. “I do not believe that a woman’s understanding is

capable of entirely appreciating everything that you will find there, but I have no doubt those authors will give you some ideas."

Nothing could be more paternally kind than his tone as he thus held up the lamp of his knowledge to light the way for his bride, yet it was with something less than gratitude that Barbara replied—

"Have I so few, then?"

"I mean that they will add to your ideas, Barbara."

"I see," she said, a little drily.

"On the other hand," he continued, "I do not wish you to become too much of a book-worm. A woman's true sphere is society—using society in the widest sense: I mean by that, her relations to other people,—her husband, her children, her friends, and even her servants. For I hold most strongly that our inferiors can be elevated and improved by the judicious example and intelligent interest of their master or mistress. Now, for example, I shall tell you what I do."

And thereupon he described at some length and with commendable clearness the various ways in which, by acting as an example and teacher, he had brought his household to its present high state of efficiency.

At the end of this discourse they rejoined

the others, and the whole party sat down to the finest luncheon Barbara had ever eaten. Afterwards their host had a long conversation with Mrs Strynd, and then the carriage took the fortunate Miss Cheyne and her relatives back to Fogo House.

"Isn't it a delightful place?" said Rose.

"Very," said Barbara cordially.

"And to think of your so soon being mistress of it all!" exclaimed Aunt Jane, who was beaming more kindly than ever.

"Soon?" said Barbara. "How soon?"

"Why, in a month, my dear."

"A month! Who arranged that?"

"Mr Clestran and I have been discussing all the arrangements," said Aunt Jane. "Did he not mention the date to you?"

"No," cried Barbara; "he certainly did not! If he had, I should have told him it was far too soon. A month!"

"Well, it is all settled now."

"You might have consulted me. Have I *nothing* to say to it?"

"My dear, you can trust Mr Clestran—or Thomas, I should say. He knows exactly what is best to be done."

Barbara made no answer, but the thought of the oriental sultan came back again, and this time was not so swiftly dismissed.

“I certainly shall not be married in a month,” she resolved. “If he thinks he can order me about like that, he is mistaken.”

CHAPTER VIII.

ENDS WITH A DISCOVERY.

Mr Clestran came over to Fogo on the following day, and Barbara lost no time in telling him what she thought of his hurried matrimonial plans.

“A month is absurd!” she declared emphatically.

Her face was so animated and her eye so bright as she made this protest, that her lover considered the time absurd only in being so long. But instead of saying so, and carrying his point by a flattering ardour, he sternly repressed his feelings and put the argument as he thought it ought to be put—sensibly and firmly.

“My dear Barbara, I have considered the matter carefully, and I can see no reason whatsoever why our marriage should be postponed. What are your reasons?”

"I must get my trousseau, for one thing."

"Your aunt and I have talked that over, and I have given her directions to order the necessary outfit at once. It can easily be ready in time."

"*You* gave her directions!" cried Barbara.

"Please be sensible. You are to be my wife, and I cannot see why you should object to my using my privileges as your husband."

"You are not my husband yet," said Barbara tartly. "And please remember that."

Mr Clestran frowned, and his frown gave his face a most severe and formidable look.

"It is useless to discuss matters in this spirit," he replied. "I have made up my mind, and if you cannot suggest any valid reasons for postponing our marriage, we may consider the date finally settled."

Barbara retaliated by a sarcastic coolness, which merely had the effect of terminating their conversation. He quietly changed the subject and then left her to give (she presumed) more directions to her aunt. In reality he was considerably disconcerted by what he considered her outburst of temper, and he made up his mind more firmly than ever to be resolute and sensible, and repress his growing affection for this unreasonable girl till she met him in a different spirit.

As for Barbara, her indignation was so high that, little as she cared for confiding in her cousins, she could not restrain herself from a brief outburst to Rose.

"Am I one of his prize tulips, or patent taps, or automatic servants?" she exclaimed. "He tells me to marry him, fixes the date of the wedding, orders the trousseau, and, I suppose, intends to take me to church in a perambulator! Rose, I shan't stand it!"

Rose opened her blue eyes in astonished reproach.

"How can you say such things, Barbara, of the man you are going to marry? Mr Clestran knows far better than any of us what is the right thing to do."

"Thank you for your good opinion, Miss Rose," said the voice of Mr Clestran himself. "I could not avoid overhearing your last sentence as I entered the room, and I bow to your judgment."

His eye was upon Barbara as he made a half-playful inclination towards her cousin, but without even exchanging a glance she walked out of the room.

Rose looked at him with a mixture of pleasure, embarrassment, and sympathy.

"I was only defending you," she said. "I mean——" she stopped in fresh embarrassment.

"I understand; and I am fortunate in having such an advocate. I can assure you I value your assistance very highly."

Rose blushed so at this praise that she had to turn her face away for an instant. When she looked back again he was smiling with his most engaging air.

"I congratulate Barbara upon her relations," he said. "And now I must try to find her and tell her so."

A very happy speech he considered this, for highly as he esteemed his own powers of persuasion, he was far from despising the assistance of her relatives in managing his restive *fiancée*. But the best laid schemes of even a Thomas Clestran have sometimes the most uncalculated consequences. Rose had always been rather a favourite of his, and on her part she had regarded him as the finest creature in the world. His freak of deciding to marry Barbara Cheyne had rather shaken her idol on his stool; but this short scene not only reinstated him, but put the wildest fancies into her head. Supposing—as surely he must—he discovered in time the real nature of her cousin, where would his wounded heart turn most naturally for comfort? Where it had already found a friend? Well, why not?

Rose came up to the mirror, and for the next

quarter of an hour continued her meditations before it. There was certainly something agreeable in her style of beauty that the more speciously attractive Barbara lacked, and then what a difference between their characters! It was rather a designing and an ingenious than a very sapient head that made these reflections; but once they were made they took up their lodging in it, to discomfit considerably Mr Clestran's diplomacy.

Their immediate result was seen in a change of attitude towards her cousin. Nobody now could be more sympathetic than Rose; and, to tell the truth, the girl whom all the county was declaring fortunate beyond belief had more need of a friend than ever in her life before. She was so young and so inexperienced and so utterly penniless that what sort of opposition could she make to that resolute lover and her sophisticated aunt? Mr Clestran proposed a date for the wedding, Aunt Jane seconded; and after a brief spirited struggle, Barbara had to submit. For what was to be done in the face of a hint that delay was all very well for girls with homes of their own to live in meanwhile? A current too strong to be resisted seemed to be sweeping her like a swirling straw towards her inevitable destiny.

From one quarter she might have got

genuine sympathy, had she dreamt of looking for it there. Tilly Strynd, with all her acidity of temper and distaste for the Barbara of old, had too much clan feeling for her sex to witness this hustling unmoved.

"I think it's a scandal," she said outright. "Thomas Clestran imagines he has only to press one of his own waistcoat buttons and the whole universe moves in any direction he likes."

"I trust you will not put any such ideas into Barbara's head," cried her mother in some alarm. "Everything is going very smoothly, and they are both exceedingly happy."

"Have you ever seen a dog tied behind a train?" asked Tilly. "He would look happy, wouldn't he?"

"Barbara is getting everything she can possibly want," said Rose. "Mr Clestran is generosity itself."

"Oh, I know you wouldn't keep the generous Thomas waiting," snapped Tilly; and this retort, though it did nothing for Barbara, had at least the effect of throwing Rose into unmistakable confusion.

She felt it to be not only unkind and unmaidenly, but unjust, for who was standing by Barbara so staunchly as she? And Barbara, who would no sooner have thought of confiding in Tilly than in Aunt Jane herself, was daily

beginning to appreciate better the unexpected sympathy of cousin Rose.

Not that she was actually unhappy—there was no time for that. Preparations had to be made so fast, and journeys to the town, visits to Pittentrews, and congratulations from neighbours she hardly knew, followed so quickly upon one another, that she had no leisure to think except at nights, and then, between tiredness and novelty, her mind seemed scarcely to belong to her. Yet there were always present both a void and a little something that ought to have been away. The little something was like a projecting nail in a shoe, that never quite lets the wearer forget its presence, but worries constantly along the fairest road. And the void was like an empty chair where a dear friend should be sitting. Sometimes she almost forgot them both and was as gay as she ought to be; but always, in a little, she remembered and grew quiet again. So it happened that a friendly hand held out to her was very welcome, and occasionally she talked to Rose as she hardly talked to herself.

In this way a fortnight had flown past, and the other two weeks might have hurried by in the same swift even fashion, when the circumspect Aunt Jane herself let slip a word that was destined to affect this story considerably.

A very handsome necklace had just arrived for the fortunate Barbara, and they were all four admiring it.

"Naturally," said Mrs Strynd, "he will wish to send you many gifts, my dear, now that he has not even a son to enjoy them."

"A son?" asked Barbara. "Had he ever a son?"

Aunt Jane bit her lip. If Mr Clestran had not mentioned this circumstance, presumably it was for good reasons.

"He has a son," she replied; "but if he has said nothing about him yet, I should wait till he does."

"I have the right to know," declared Barbara warmly. "Where is the son?"

"Eating husks," said Tilly.

"Tilly!" cried her mother.

"That is the story in two words," answered Tilly, "but tell it as you like, dear mamma."

"Thomas Clestran's son was no credit to his father," said Mrs Strynd, "and he was disinherited some years ago."

"But I thought the estate was entailed," said Barbara.

"It is possible to break an entail, and that is either done or going to be done. Otherwise it would scarcely be fair to you."

"While if he is safely disinherited, that of

course will be fair to both of you," suggested Tilly.

"Tilly!" cried her mother again, this time in high indignation, "you know nothing about it!"

Barbara said nothing more, but thoughts were crowding all the faster for her silence.

CHAPTER IX.

IN WHICH MR CLESTRAN IS HAPPILY INSPIRED.

At this time Mr Clestran somewhat unexpectedly received a guest. Riding to Ochil Castle he found its owner bereft of his house-keeper, and inclined to console himself for this misfortune and its consequent discomforts with his old friend and enemy, the bottle. This would never do at all, for Sir Andrew was going to act as best man at the great event; and though he might be sobered quickly upon an emergency, it was better that he should remain in full possession of his faculties for as long previously as possible. So he was promptly taken to the shelter and good influences of Pittentrews.

Mr Clestran was too accustomed to laying down laws and seeing that they were obeyed

to find anything humorous in this precaution. He spent a long and pleasant evening in explaining upon what system and with what excellent results he was grappling with the apparently difficult but really, to a man of sense, quite simple problem of woman and matrimony; and the next morning he drove his friend over to pay his respects at Fogo.

He was in excellent spirits, and rallied the baronet genially on his remissness in not having made Miss Cheyne's acquaintance sooner.

"You will find her charming," he declared. "I am a luckier man than you imagine, Dunsappie!"

Indeed Thomas Clestran was daily becoming fonder of this girl he had chosen with so much acumen. He had never again made any demonstration of his affection; on the contrary, he had carried out to the letter his resolution to act as the firm and sensible man of the world, but his heart all the time grew warmer.

"She must be something uncommon to please you so well," said Dunsappie. "I'd have gone over to see her sooner, but, to tell you the truth, I couldn't lay my hands on a decent suit of clothes when I wanted one."

"My dear fellow, you look a buck of the first water!"

"Oh, I had 'em all right," explained Dun-

sappie, "only they were under some cartridges. I can't afford a valet, and the deuce take me if I know where things get to."

This scandalous confession aroused the born organiser.

"Remind me to show you my wardrobe," said Mr Clestran. "I had it specially constructed to my own design. It is almost impossible that anything can get out of place in it. The principle is this——"

And for the rest of the drive Sir Andrew was entertained by a disquisition on the scientific construction of wardrobes.

I do not know whether he was quite as interested in this as he should have been, but there was no indifference in his survey of Miss Barbara Cheyne.

"By God! Clestran's no fool," he said to himself. "If he isn't happy with a girl like that, be hanged to him!"

As he watched her more closely, he thought, "I wonder if she is happy too? She looks a little out of sorts."

Barbara, on her side, hardly noticed at all this shambling, freckle-faced, red-bearded visitor, with his kindly blue eyes and his best suit of clothes; though, had she known the part he was to play in her history, she might have looked more attentively. But just at present

she had too much on her mind, and could think of nothing else till she had eased it. How to broach the subject she did not quite know. Her lover was at all times formidable, and to-day he apparently had something on his mind also, for his manner was a little absent. At last she said to him boldly—

“Tom” (it was still rather an effort to call him by this familiar syllable), “I only heard last night that you had a son.”

He started, and looked at her so sharply that it seemed to her he must have been thinking of the same thing.

“Indeed?” he replied, and a frown began to gather over his heavy eyebrows.

He said nothing else, but waited for her.

“Why didn’t you tell me yourself?” she asked.

“Presumably because I had good reasons for not telling you.”

“What were they?”

“Barbara,” he said, “you have not found me inquisitive, I think, and I had looked for a similar forbearance on your part.”

“I only heard by accident,” she said, her colour rising. “And I am *not* inquisitive, but I want to know more about him.”

These glimpses of character in his bride-elect always annoyed Mr Clestran. Theoreti-

cally he held strong views on the necessity for a woman having a mind of her own and knowing it too; but, like other thinkers, he did not always recognise his ideals when he met them in the street. He did not wish to be hasty, and he deliberated for a minute before he answered in a measured and dignified voice—

“Since you desire to know more I may tell you this, that I have a son, but that he will not come either into your life or into mine.”

“What has he done that you should cut him off?”

“It is, I think, sufficient if I tell you he was an undutiful son.”

This was not at all sufficient for Barbara. A passion for justice, a revolt against harshness, filled her heart, and she wanted to be sure that the one had been done and the other left undone.

“I want to know more about it,” she said.

“Barbara,” he replied, “I have conceded a great deal to your curiosity in referring at all to a subject which is very painful to me. May I ask why you should seek to know more?”

“I wondered whether you had been quite fair.”

For a moment Mr Clestran looked as staggered as if his conduct had suddenly been

questioned by his dog; then his expression became chilly and bleak as an east wind.

"I alone am responsible for my conduct," he replied.

Barbara returned no answer, and they walked in silence across the lawn to the house, but her heart was full of indignation. This was the confidence he gave her! this the way he spoke!

"By the way," he remarked, "I am going to London for a few days, possibly the best part of a week. I have business that must be done before our marriage."

A phrase of her aunt's suddenly came into Barbara's head, and she jumped headlong at a feminine conclusion.

"Disinheriting your son?" she asked.

He started, and looked hard at her. Then, apparently satisfied that this was a reckless guess made out of spite, he answered in a tone of cold rebuke—

"A man has naturally some affairs to settle before he marries. That answer, I am afraid, must satisfy your somewhat untimely curiosity."

Yet he loved this girl in his own fashion, and would have told you that he chid her thus on principle.

Whether he was annoyed on principle is harder to say, but certainly he was greatly

disconcerted by this talk. She had been listening to women's gossip, he thought,—the worst of all influences upon a young girl's mind, even if the women were his excellent friends the Strynds. He contrasted her usual docile manner with him, the outcome of his own masculine sensible influence, with this unreasonable outburst. What would be the effect of possibly a week without him and nothing to counteract the woman's tittle-tattle that would be sure to be going on? Suddenly he asked her, just before they reached the house—

“You are reading that volume of Herbert Spencer I gave you?”

“No,” she said, “not a word.”

Something must be done evidently, and by another happy inspiration an idea came to him. He had to leave Dunsappie behind. Why not get Mrs Strynd to invite his guest to stay at Fogo House in his absence? Barbara would thus have the benefit of a well-read and instructive companion, and the baronet's sobriety would be insured. Dunsappie would further be instructed to check gossip and rebuff questions.

After a few minutes' consideration of this scheme he came to the conclusion that it was in every way satisfactory and desirable, and he promptly declared his wishes to Mrs Strynd.

At first she was considerably taken aback ; for though she knew Sir Andrew well, and greatly appreciated baronets and suchlike, yet a visitor in the midst of wedding preparations was less seasonable, she could not but think, than at some other time ; while a hint that the decanters must not be left about hardly tended to increase her readiness. But Mr Clestran was so persuasively peremptory, and so impervious to arguments other than his own, that it ended in her promising to invite Sir Andrew to stay with them till his return.

As for Dunsappie, that amiable man was briefly told what was going to be done with him, and then driven by his host back to Pit-tentrews to collect his luggage.

“ But what the devil do they want with me at Fogo ? ” he inquired when they were under way and he had time to put a question. “ I’m not a ladies’ man, and I’m not ornamental ; and, by Jove ! they probably won’t let me smoke, and you know the kind of liquor women keep. Hang it, Clestran, I came to stay with you, not with Mrs Strynd : she’s a dashed pleasant person and all that, but what the deuce does she want with me, or rather what the deuce are you driving at ? ”

This outburst, which represented the baronet’s most emphatic manner and strongest aspect, had

no effect whatever upon his masterful friend. With arguments so logical that there was no meeting them at all, Mr Clestran impressed upon him the necessity for this step, and Sir Andrew's grumble changed into a resigned sigh.

"I suppose you know your business best, old man," he said; "and of course you can trust me to set an example of sobriety and all the rest of it, and I'll do what I can to keep your memory green and prevent 'em from talking about things they shouldn't, and—er—help Miss Cheyne to read Shakespeare and so forth. It's not exactly my line, but, as you say, it's wonderful what a fellow can do if he tries."

These submissions to his better judgment always gratified Mr Clestran, and impressed him still more strongly with his own powers of perceiving the truth himself and revealing it to others. In the present instance he became surer than ever that his policy combined the astuteness of a Macchiavelli with the irresistible strength of a Bismarck. This feeling as of a god directing mortals gave him such a keen satisfaction as partly to compensate for the attitude of Barbara. But that attitude must be discontinued,—he was resolved on that, and determined that she should feel the weight of his displeasure until of her own accord she expressed contrition and amended her ways. That

was the only scientific method of dealing with women.

On the following morning he left for London, and the baronet took up his quarters at Fogo House.

CHAPTER X.

THE SENTINEL.

Sir Andrew Dunsappie was relieved to find that his principal fears regarding a visit to Fogo were unfounded. He was allowed to smoke as much as he liked, and the liquor was quite tolerable. As, in addition, the ladies left him to himself for most of the day, and there were plenty of books to read, he quickly settled down into his customary happy-go-lucky good-natured existence; appearing fairly punctually for meals, agreeing amiably with everybody, and entertaining himself by shrewd observations, which would have greatly surprised the ladies if they had heard them.

Naturally his closest regard was turned to Barbara; and it was not without misgivings that he saw how silent she was, and when a smiling humorous moment came, how quickly it fled again.

"Poor bairn," he said to himself. "Tom Clestran is giving her a deuce of a drilling, I'm thinking. Devilish fine in theory, dashed uncomfortable in practice. System's all very well, wish I'd more myself, but that child's getting too much."

In the kindness of his heart he made one or two amiable overtures of friendship, and Barbara began to have a dim feeling that this odd-looking and (it must be admitted) rather dissipated-looking man was unaccountably friendly towards her; for she was quite shrewd enough to surmise that Mr Clestran's friends probably did not view her in the same light as her lover himself. But she was in anything but an expansive mood, and Sir Andrew, as he always said, was no great ladies' man, so that the part of his duties which consisted in superintending Miss Cheyne's intellectual growth was in danger of being neglected.

"I don't know how to begin," said Sir Andrew to himself. "It's all very well for Clestran to say, 'Read some serious book with her for two hours a-day,' but, the deuce take me! what book? and when am I going to get a chance? Hang it! if I stick to two whiskies a-day I am not doing so badly, without bothering a girl who doesn't want me."

So with a philosophical sigh he heroically

turned his eyes from the cupboard where he knew refreshments were kept, and went out for a walk along the shore.

"Rotten idea asking me here at all," he thought; "but old Clestran has such wonderful notions, and I suppose he knows best."

It is doubtful whether he would have retained this regard for his friend's judgment had he overheard a conversation between Barbara and her cousin which took place that same morning.

"Haven't you heard from Mr Clestran yet?" asked Rose.

"No," said Barbara.

They were in Barbara's room, examining the latest arrived of the trousseau garments, an occupation which ought to have put the possessor of these creations in the highest spirits. Yet, with a secret feeling very like satisfaction, her cousin saw that there was no joy in her smile.

"I wonder why he hasn't written?" she said.

Barbara wondered too, but she was not going to admit it, and she only answered—

"He is very busy."

Rose coughed with all the intonation of scepticism that a cough can carry. Her glance just then fell upon the window.

"There goes Sir Andrew to think over his

report," she remarked lightly, but with an inward tremor of excitement, like a man who has thrown a bomb and awaits the explosion.

"What report?"

Rose looked elaborately confused.

"I suppose I ought not to have said anything about it," she murmured.

"What do you mean?" asked Barbara quickly. "Rose, tell me! Don't stand there looking mysterious; you can tell me quite well if you like."

"You will *promise* not to say a word—not a *single* word—to any one? I only heard it from mother in confidence."

"Yes, I promise."

"Well, it's only that Mr Clestran has stationed Sir Andrew here as a kind of sentinel."

"To watch me?" cried Barbara.

Again Rose hesitated, a very natural thing to do in the circumstances.

"It isn't to watch any one else, I suppose," she admitted.

"Oh!" said Barbara slowly.

Rose was almost frightened to see how deep the shaft had gone home.

There was silence for a minute, and then Barbara said—

"I shall see Sir Andrew and find out if it is true. If it is——"

She stopped and turned away from her cousin, and Rose could see her quickly slip her handkerchief up to her face.

"Remember you promised not to tell any one, you know," she said anxiously.

"I'll find out without that," replied Barbara in a voice that broke a little in the middle of her sentence.

Rose watched her slim back for a minute or two longer, and then left the room hurriedly.

About an hour later Sir Andrew Dunsappie was returning from his walk when he met the lady for whose intellectual activity he was in part responsible. In the course of his ruminations he had come to the conclusion that it would sound better to be able to tell Clestran in a general way that he had held serious converse with his *fiancée*.

"It'll please the man," he thought; "and if I don't, he'll read me one of his dashed lectures on my slack habits."

So as soon as they met he smiled amiably, and, by way of losing no time, plunged instantly *in medias res*.

"You're fond of — er — Shakespeare, Miss Cheyne?" he asked.

"I'm afraid I haven't read very much Shakespeare," she answered.

"You ought to be," he said affably. "Great-

est name in our literature, you know. I used to spout him by the hour."

This struck the honest Dunsappie as a very happy way of bringing his erudition within reach of a young mind, and he went on genially, "Ever read any Shelley?—

‘The sanguine sunrise with his meteor eyes
And his burning plumes outspread.’

I knew the whole of that once—knew a lot of poetry, in fact, though perhaps you wouldn't think it of me, would you?"

He spoke so simply and enthusiastically that Barbara began to wonder whether he could really be here as a "sentinel."

"I don't know you well enough to say," she answered.

"No more you do, of course; foolish of me to ask. But you know I don't look much like a reading man, I fancy."

"What ought a reading man to look like?"

"Oh, spectacles and serious-looking, and not so much colour—ha, ha!" laughed Dunsappie. "By Jove! though, Clestran's a reading man; I ought to be careful what I say. I don't want to quarrel with you, Miss Cheyne; we're going to be neighbours, you know."

"Are you sure?" was the question on the tip of Barbara's tongue, and though she did not

say it, that thought had been uppermost in her mind for the last hour.

"Fine fellow, Tom Clestran," Dunsappie went on in his most friendly way, "and a wonderfully well-informed man."

Barbara murmured something that might pass as assent, and then abruptly she asked—

"Did he ask you to examine me?"

"Examine you?" exclaimed Sir Andrew. "I beg your pardon?"

"I mean did he suggest that I needed an eye on me to keep me at my books and out of mischief?"

She smiled so naturally as she asked that Dunsappie innocently answered—

"By Jove! yes, he did. Ha! ha! Rather good, isn't it, the idea of me turning chaperone?"

"Then you have been keeping an eye on me?" she inquired.

"I'm afraid I haven't," he said apologetically. "I thought I might bore you, don't you know."

"Thank you," said Barbara.

Dunsappie looked at her in surprise. He had meant, good man, to apologise for his remissness, and here she was thanking him for letting her be. And the tone in which she spoke disturbed him.

"I hope to goodness nothing's up," he thought.

For quite five minutes he felt anxious, but by the end of that time the luncheon gong sounded, and being exceedingly hungry after his walk, his cares fled before an excellent Irish stew.

In the meantime Barbara's story had come to a crisis. When she came back to the house the post had arrived, and there was her letter at last. She took it to her room, her heart beating quickly with resentment against its writer. It would have had to be very much a love-letter indeed to soothe her angry spirit, and instead this was what she read:—

“MY DEAR BARBARA,—I received your letter on Monday, and have waited till now to answer it in order that I might not say anything hastily that I should afterwards regret. Candidly I was disappointed in your letter; it contained neither the expressions of affection I had hoped for, nor any reference to your pursuits (whether reading, &c., in accordance with my wishes), nor any indications of regret for your recent suspicions of me. Under these circumstances my affection cannot take the language I should like to use. If you meet me in a loving open spirit you may be quite sure, my dear Barbara, that I shall meet you more than half-way. But so long as you persist in questioning my conduct and denying me the confidence I seek, a full

understanding between us is evidently impossible. I make no doubt, however, that now you know my feelings you will trust me better. Pardon my frankness, but it is better to speak our minds to one another freely, is it not, my dearest?

"I shall be detained longer in London than I thought, but you may expect me back on Friday, when, as you well know, I shall be exceedingly glad to see you again.

"With much love. Yours affectionately,
"THOMAS R. CLESTRAN."

No letter could have been composed with better intentions, or upon a more carefully thought-out principle. He had scrupulously repressed the warm feelings which, if they had crept from his heart on to the paper, might have weakened the effect of the admonition he felt impelled to deliver. They would have been inconsistent; and it was one of his leading principles that women, though they may be pleased for the moment by a lapse into affectionate weakness, yet in their hearts admire, esteem, and cling to the consistent and resolute lover. And so he had taken careful aim and fired straight into the most sensitive part of a sensitive girl. This simile he would have repudiated as an ignorant libel, but that was what he had done.

The first thing Barbara did was to crumple

the letter fiercely in her hand ; the next, to tear it into little pieces and burn it carefully in the grate. As she watched the fragments char, curl up, and scatter in black specks she felt that the deed was a symbol. Now, she thought, she knew this man and knew herself, and nevermore could they meet but as strangers.

CHAPTER XI.

THE CONSPIRATORS.

Barbara felt little disposed to meet company at lunch, but by a fortunate and, as it happened, fateful chance, her aunt was laid up that morning with a headache, and Tilly had gone to spend a day or two with friends, so that there were only Rose and Sir Andrew and herself at the table. Abstracted and torn by thought as she was, every little circumstance must have subconsciously impressed her ; for in the light of after events she could always picture each detail of that meal,—how Sir Andrew's hand trembled as he raised his fork, and how flat his amiable efforts at conversation fell ; how Rose kept glancing at her, and how she wished no eye would ever turn her way again.

"I must escape, I must escape!" ran like a tune in her head, till she could scarcely sit still for impatience to be up and out of this house.

The very instant she could leave the table she fled to her room and locked the door. Now she was at least alone and could think what was to be done. On her bed lay the trousseau dresses; her chairs were piled with divers trousseau garments; Thomas Clestran's photograph looked at her from mantelpiece and dressing-table; his presents lay beside them. The whole room was pervaded by an air of imminent matrimony. The river that swept her along was close upon its final fall; unless she struggled to the bank now, down with the current she must inevitably plunge. But how to escape her fate?—that was the question now. She sat down to think, and to her surprise the fog that had been settling ever thicker on her mind since the day of her engagement was clean swept away by the wind of this emergency. Her wits were clear, her head was cool, she could see exactly where she stood and what would happen if she let things take their course; but as for a way out of it, she could only perceive too plainly the obstacles. Everything in the room her eyes fell upon seemed to say to her—"Too late. Here we are: presents, frocks, photographs, a score of pledges that you will go to church

with Thomas Clestran and become the lady of Pittentrews. Evade us, if you can!"

For one moment she had made up her mind to go through with it all and stoutly make the best of things. The next she was more fiercely determined to be free.

"But how can I get out of it?" she cried. "Will nobody help me?"

Like an answer to her cry came a knock upon the door.

She threw a glance at the glass, gave her hair a touch or two, and turned the key.

"Who is there?" she asked.

"Only me," said the voice of Rose. "May I come in?"

She was the nearest approach to a confidant poor Barbara possessed, and it was something to have a sympathetic ear to listen to her trouble, so gladly enough she let her in.

Rose had divined that something was very much the matter. She had seen the letter waiting for her cousin, she had noted its effects at lunch, she had heard the door being locked, and on tiptoe with impatience had waited till she thought Barbara must be ready for a friend; and now, as an answer to a prayer, she had come. Nothing, I fear, could have been less heavenly than her heart, but her little round face wore an expression that might have deceived

an angel. Certainly Barbara never for an instant questioned the sincerity of her sympathy.

"Dear Barbara, what has happened?" she cried.

"I am going to break off my engagement," said Barbara, with considerably more calmness and confidence than she felt.

Rose had expected some hopeful symptoms, but this news seemed too amazingly good to be true.

"Oh, Barbara, I'm sorry," was all she was able to murmur.

"I cannot stand it any longer!" cried Barbara, her coolness slipping from her.

"You got your letter?" asked Rose.

"Yes, and that was the last straw. I am not going to marry a stone image of egotism,—not if he had twelve hundred thousand a-year; not if he were the only man in the universe!"

Rose could not trust herself to comment on this libel upon her hero. She longed to defend him, and she could willingly have slapped her ungrateful cousin's face; but to save him from the fate of marrying such a termagant, a little dissimulation was surely pardonable.

"If you feel like that, of course you ought not to marry him. It would be wicked of you," she declared.

"I'd never, never, *never* have promised to, if I

had known what kind of a man he was. But I was forced into it. I never was given a choice at all. Let them call me a jilt if they like—I cannot do it, Rose! He treats me like a servant, or an animal, or a child!”

Again Rose dared not reply directly to this blasphemy.

“What shall you do then?” she asked hastily.

For a moment Barbara was silent.

“What ought I to do?” she said more quietly. “He will simply frown and tell me I don’t know my own mind, and *force* me to marry him. I know he will.”

“Oh, Barbara! he is too much of a gentleman!”

“He ought to be; but then you see he will look such a fool if he is suddenly thrown over and his system breaks down. Oh, I’ve thought it all out and I *know* he won’t release me; and Aunt Jane will help him, and—what can I do?”

“Supposing you were to go away?”

“That is the only thing to be done. I’ve made up my mind. But where am I to go?”

“Wouldn’t Eva—what is her name?—your school friend, take you till you decided on something?”

“Eva Harlow? Of course she would! I’ll go to her.”

Barbara's face was all animation for a moment. Then it fell as she quickly thought over the scheme.

"They live in London," she said, "and how am I to get there? I have only five and sevenpence in my purse; one can't go to London with that."

"But you have twenty pounds of your own. Mamma has told me so."

"So I have!" cried Barbara. "But Aunt Jane won't give it me to help me run away from her dear Thomas Clestran."

"I can lend you ten pounds."

"Rose, you dear!" cried Barbara; and for the first time that diplomatist felt a pang of contrition as her cousin kissed her affectionately.

"Are you sure you can spare it?"

"Quite, dear," said Rose.

"Positive?"

"Perfectly."

"Well then," said Barbara, "it only remains to get out of the house without any one knowing, and be off by the London train before he comes back. This is Thursday, and he expects to be home to-morrow. So I must catch a train to-night. How can I get to the station?"

She spoke with such assured, business-like decision, that Rose looked at her in wonder, mingled with a little fear. She herself could

plot rather ingeniously, she thought; but here was a veritable Guy Fawkes, and she began to tremble lest she should get involved in some dreadful escapade. Were a suspicion of her share in it to get about her whole purpose would be utterly undone.

"You mustn't let it be known I lent you the money, or even knew anything about it," she said anxiously. "Mamma would be dreadfully angry."

"I'll do it all myself," said Barbara. "Don't you worry; I'm not given to betraying my friends."

And, ungrateful, libellous little beast though she might be, Rose knew she could trust her word.

"How can I get a trap to the station?" she asked next.

"When are you going to start?"

"As soon as it gets dark."

"You can't get Simpson to drive you: he would be sure to refer to mamma first," said Rose.

Simpson was the coachman who drove the one-horse carriage, a dour, honest family servant, unapproachable by blandishments.

Barbara reflected.

"Sir Andrew must drive me," she said.

Rose opened her blue eyes.

"Sir Andrew!" she exclaimed. "Mr Cles-tran's friend?"

"I shall go in disguise."

Rose gasped.

"What disguise?"

"Some of his own clothes."

"Barbara! But surely he would recognise you."

"Sometimes he isn't quite sober, I believe," said Barbara. "You must offer him some whisky-and-soda instead of tea."

"No, Barbara, I must draw the line somewhere," replied Rose in a terrible flutter.

"Well then, I shall."

"Make him drunk?" cried Rose.

"Drunk! Of course not. I only mean that he won't be quite so wide-awake if he has whisky instead of tea. Tea makes people wakeful, and whisky is often used to put them to sleep."

"But even then how will you get him to drive you?"

"That is the only thing to be arranged," said Barbara, "and we must think it out now. Aunt Jane won't be up to-day, will she?"

"No; her headache is worse this afternoon."

"Thank goodness for that!" exclaimed her undutiful niece as devoutly as if she had been offering a prayer for her recovery.

Every fibre of her body was thrilling with a

single idea—that she must be out of this house and far on her way to safety before Thomas Clestran returned. One deep impression that resolute lover had produced upon her, an impression of unyielding, unreasoning strength, a strength that would regard no arguments other than his own, that would conquer her determination by sheer unpitying force if she waited to see him. Flight, instant flight, was her only hope, with the vivid memory of his stern face haunting her all the way. Her plight was desperate, her spirit was high, and she felt that there was scarcely a crime she would have stuck at to find her freedom. And the only counsellor she had was egging her on to carry out her rash resolve.

Let these things be remembered on behalf of a heroine who was about to violate all the rules for the proper guidance of young ladies.

CHAPTER XII.

WHO GOES THERE?

The unsuspecting Dunsappie watched his third glass of grog ebb away with a livelier appreciation of woman's kindness than he had

ever felt before. It was exactly what he had been wanting,—this little customary afternoon nip,—and his envy of his friend's good fortune increased.

“Lucky old Tommy,” he thought; “he's got a girl that knows jus' what a man needs.”

Somehow or other the nip had already been multiplied by three, and immediatly after it became quadrupled; but on a dark blustering afternoon, with no one to talk to and only the wind to break the silence of the quiet library where he sat and smoked, a man was surely not expected to count his glasses.

“Best day I've had since I came,” he said to himself comfortably. “Cracked up ol' Tommy to his girl, made her love him mush more, and had a good drink myself. Reason she thought of it was 'cause I cracked him up. Hullo! here she is. Something up too.”

The baronet rose with an exaggerated air of politeness, and smiled such a beaming smile that poor Barbara's spirits suddenly sank. She had only wanted him to be not too quick-witted, but never in the world intended that he should have to grasp the back of his chair to avoid oscillating from the true perpendicular.

“Can I do anything?” he asked. “You look ex—ex—exceedingly annoyed.”

He had meant to say "agitated," and had a dim idea that a wrong word had somehow crept in; but he kept on smiling just the same.

Again Barbara's wits cleared with the emergency.

"I have come to ask if you will do me a great, *great* favour, Sir Andrew," she said.

"Mos' certainly, my dear Miss Cheyne. What is it?"

She hesitated in the most natural and convincing manner before she confessed—

"I once had an admirer."

"Tuts, tuts, dear me!" said Dunsappie, endeavouring to throw a paternal intonation into these comments.

"Of course I never encouraged him; but he heard of my engagement, and he has come here to see me."

"Whew!" whistled Dunsappie. "I say, Tommy Clestran mustn't hear of this!"

"I don't want him to, and that's why I have come to you. I want you to drive him away."

"Do my best," said the baronet, unconsciously feeling his biceps. "How big is he?"

"I mean—drive him to the station."

"I'll kick him all the way if I can, my dear. That's to say, if he makes a fuss."

"Drive him in a dog-cart, I mean," explained Barbara.

"Oh, I see! Rather, with pleasure. Start now?"

"In half an hour, can you?"

"Cert'nly. Where is he?"

"He will meet you just outside the gate, because I don't want a soul to see him. You must tell Simpson you want the dog-cart to drive to Ochil Castle on urgent business, and whatever you do, you mustn't take Simpson with you. Nobody but you must know anything about it."

"I understand," said Dunsappie. "I'll manage, don' you fear. By th' bye, Mrs Strynd doesn't know?"

"None of them know."

"Trust me, none of 'em ever shall. For Clestran's sake, don' you know; and for yours too, o' course."

The obliging baronet smiled more genially than ever, and with a hurried step—rather as though the furniture might try to intercept him, Barbara thought—he left the room, his fourth nip unfinished, so eager was he to do his devoir. His last sentence pricked her conscience sharply for a moment, but there was no use in remorse now. She, too, hurried to make her last preparations.

About half an hour later a slight figure, wrapped in a topcoat once the property of the late Mr Strynd, slipped silently downstairs and stole out into the dusk of the evening. The topcoat concealed Sir Andrew Dunsappie's oldest suit of clothes (Barbara chose this because it had shrunk most), which its present wearer found the most uncomfortable and embarrassing attire she had ever donned. To increase its disadvantages she had not even had the assistance of Rose in putting it on, for that conspirator had no sooner conspired than she retired to her room to establish an alibi.

"However," thought Barbara, "I shan't wear the things an instant longer than I can help."

In her hand she carried a bag containing a change of feminine raiment, half a cake, and her own shorn brown hair, and, thus equipped, walked softly on the grass, keeping under the shade of bushes till she had reached the white painted gate. She went through and stood by the wall of the garden, the wind shaking and beating the branches over her head, and the sea hard by grinding the pebbles of the beach and crashing continuously all down the coast.

"What if he doesn't come!" she thought.

But a minute later she heard the rumble of wheels upon the gravel drive, and stepped out to open the gate for her deliverer.

"Mind you shut it again," said Dunsappie, "and then jump in as quick's you like. Too damned stormy for sitting still."

She pulled the peak of her cap well over her eyes, and with a tremor of excitement to see whether by some terrible chance he might know her, she jumped in beside him. It was the dog-cart he was driving, so they sat elbow by elbow; but raised as he was on the driver's seat, he could luckily only see the top of her head, particularly as she kept it well bent down, and not a suspicion crossed his mind.

"Nice business this, young man," he observed, as he lashed the old horse into his speediest trot.

Barbara made an inarticulate murmur which Dunsappie evidently took as expressing some contrition for the young man's scandalous conduct.

"Yes," he went on sententiously, "it's all very well to say you're sorry; but I've got to turn out—bad night, cold in m' head—and drive you to the station in order to pr'serve honour of an innocent girl. Dishgraceful, sir, I call it—dishgraceful!"

After this exordium he was silent for a few minutes, ruminating, she supposed, on the waywardness of young blood. It was now almost dark, the wind blew in wild gusts off the sea,

and a sprinkle of rain whipped her cheek. She felt little enough disposed for conversation, even if it had not been so dangerous to raise her voice, but her companion was in the very opposite humour.

"Hol' the reins a minute," he said presently. "I'm goin' to light a pipe."

She was thankful to find that between the high wind and the baronet's shaky hand this proved to be a lengthy process, and while it lasted kept him silent save for a running commentary of muttered objurgations. But as soon as the pipe was lighted he began in a much more affable tone—

"Of course there's some excuse f'r you; she's a devilish pretty girl, and all that, but she's engaged to my frien' Mr Clestran of Pittentrews, and you ought to know bett'r. Hey? What you say? Foolish thing to do,—what?"

"Very," said Barbara, in as artificially deep a voice as she could compass.

Again she had a shiver of excitement as she waited to see whether she had betrayed herself. But he was only sucking hard at his pipe, and in a moment resumed amicably—

"Qui' right to admit it, young man; I don' ask any questions 'bout your acquaintance with Miss Cheyne, but you see f'r yourself she's in love with my frien' Mr Clestran of Pittentrews,

—man of family, twelve thousand a-year, good sportsman, fine fellow; and you mus' jus' make up your mind to take your disappointment like a man. You see that?"

"Yes," said Barbara, with more courage this time.

Apparently Sir Andrew considered he had now done his duty in admonishing this adventurer, for he abruptly launched forth in quite a different direction.

"This kin' of weather r'minds me of a lot of things: storm in 'Th' Tempest,' storm in 'Weshtward Ho!' storm in 'Rub-obinson Crusoe,' storm in 'The Pirate,'—all sorts of storms. Great advantage of reading is that it pr'vides 'ssociations; always got comp'ny to think about.

'When to the ses—sessions of sweet silent thought
I s'mmon up remembrance of things past.'"

And thereupon, with great gusto and considerable taste, he proceeded to quote first Shakespeare and then various other poets for nearly half an hour on end.

Inasmuch as this spared Barbara the duties and dangers of conversation, she felt nothing but profound relief, though it was a little marred by observing that the baronet entirely forgot to encourage his horse while the rhapsody lasted. And her train must be caught at all

costs. At last, in her most guarded voice, she ventured to remind him.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, "I'd quite forgotten 'bout th' train."

He whipped up their steed to a canter, and for a few minutes sat silent. Then in a sentimental voice he began again—

"Rather dull sometimes living here all b'myself. I've got fine old place; you mus' come an' see Ochil Castle next time you're here; five hundred years old, belonged to my fam'ly all the time; one of th' oldest fam'lies in Scotland, but something's always gone wrong; had our weakneses, don' you know, bottle an' ladies an' one thing'n another; very little money left. Wish I'd gone into business an' made some more. Wouldn't have kept steady, though, I s'pose. Just as well I didn't, p'rhaps. I can't afford to keep the place up prop'ly, and I don' know where things get to; lost my bes' suit las' time, but foun' it again all right. Sometimes wish I'd married; liked a girl once, but jus' as well I didn't. Wouldn't have made good husband, I'm 'fraid; not like my frien' Clestran. He's a lucky dog, got the nicest girl you ever saw. I'm all alone, always will be now."

Evidently Dunsappie had quite forgotten whom he was talking to in the course of this

confession ; but, rambling as it was, Barbara listened with growing contrition for playing such a trick upon this poor, lonely, kind-hearted bachelor. She blushed deeply with shame as she thought of the drink she had actually put in his way, and before she knew it she had said softly—

“ I’m very sorry.”

“ Hullo !” he exclaimed with a start, glancing down at her. “ You gave me quite a fright ; I wasn’t thinking ’bout you, and it sounded like some one else speaking to me.”

She shivered again at the risk she had run, but for all that she was glad she had spoken.

But now the lights of Rango station were close before them, and presently the drive had come to an end.

“ Good - bye,” said Sir Andrew cheerfully ; “ pleasant journey and all that. Don’ think ’bout Miss Cheyne ; you’ll get over it.”

He turned his horse and whipped up for Fogo again, thinking to himself that he had got even more into the day than he imagined, and looking forward happily to Barbara’s thanks on his return.

CHAPTER XIII.

DUNSAPPIE RECEIVES HIS THANKS.

Never before had Rose Strynd spent such an exciting miserable afternoon. She could not venture out of her room to learn how things were going, and she dared not ask a servant. Barbara might be well on her way to the station, or the scheme might have broken down,—and then could she be quite sure that her cousin would keep her word and hide her own share in the conspiracy? Yet when she came down to dinner, and found the house quiet as ever and no sign of anything having happened, she felt almost sure that the adventure must at least have begun well, and she tried to compose her mind and prepare to play the part they had arranged.

Barbara was to lock her door and leave the key under a paper in the drawing-room, where, when suspicions were aroused, but not before, it was to be found by Rose. In the meantime Barbara was supposed to be fatigued and resting, so that by this means she might have as long a start as possible.

But the discovery was unexpectedly accelerated by the appearance of Mrs Strynd at dinner.

Rose had not calculated on her getting up that day, and her heart jumped into her mouth.

"Only we two?" said her mother. "Where is Sir Andrew?"

Inquiry quickly elicited the fact that he had borrowed the dog-cart to drive to Ochil Castle.

"That is very extraordinary," said Mrs Strynd, whose temper had not been improved by her headache. "I think he might have sent to ask my permission first. And where is Barbara? Has she borrowed anything too?"

"She is lying down," said Rose glibly. "She didn't sleep well last night, and said she wouldn't come down to dinner."

"Go and see what is the matter with her. I do not approve of young people absenting themselves from meals in this way: I'm sure *I* had to make effort enough to get up."

Rose dutifully went, and presently returned with the news - that Barbara's door was locked, and herself apparently asleep.

"Indeed?" said Mrs Strynd. "Well, in that case she must do without dinner altogether. I am not going to keep anything for imaginary invalids."

Immediately dinner was over she herself went upstairs to inquire into Miss Barbara's symptoms.

She returned in considerable perturbation.

"I cannot make her hear me!" she exclaimed. "What can have happened, Rose? We must pick the lock!"

The moment had come for the discovery.

"She is probably fast asleep," said Rose, taking up a paper as she spoke, and then with a start, "Why, what is this key?"

"It is the key of Barbara's room!" cried Mrs Strynd after a moment's astonished scrutiny.

They hurried upstairs, unlocked the door of the best bedroom, and were met only by the wind blowing through the open window. The room was in pitch darkness, and no voice answered Mrs Strynd's agitated, "Barbara! are you there?"

Rose shut the window and groped for the matches, while her mother shivered by the door. Even when the candles were lit she came in with an uncertain step as though she feared some horrid discovery. But there was nothing to be seen but a disordered room and two letters lying on the dressing-table. One was addressed to "Thomas Clestran, Esq.," and carefully sealed; the other to "Mrs Strynd."

With a trembling hand Mrs Strynd tore open the envelope and read this brief message:—

"I am leaving you for good. I'm sorry to disappoint you, but I cannot make a marriage

where there is no love on either side. In my letter to Mr Clestran I have explained more fully. Keep it and give it him when he comes.

“BARBARA CHEYNE.”

The baldness and bluntness of this note added—if it were possible to add anything—to the consternation of poor Mrs Strynd. In silence she sank into a chair, while tears gathered in her eyes. But they were the tears of mortification rather than sorrow, for the first words she said were—

“What will he say? Oh, what will people think? I could have died rather than endure this disgrace!”

Then in a minute she sprang up and cried—

“But how did she get away? Somebody must have helped her! Did you know anything about it, Rose?”

“I, mamma? Oh, how *can* you imagine such a thing!”

A light began to break upon Mrs Strynd's mind.

“Sir Andrew must have taken her with him!” she exclaimed. “I see it all now! *Lady Dunsappie*, that is the meaning of it!”

So entirely convinced was she that Barbara had merely exchanged money for a title, that

she learned with great surprise of Sir Andrew's return.

"The effrontery of the man!" she said. "I suppose he thinks I am idiot enough to be hoodwinked."

And in a fine state of indignation she descended in search of the luckless baronet.

He meanwhile had returned to his sanctum in the library, and awaited in great good-humour the appearance of Barbara to learn the success of his mission, and offer him the thanks he could not but feel he deserved. And so it was with huge surprise that he beheld the entry of her aunt instead, and heard himself addressed in these remarkable terms:—

"Sir Andrew Dunsappie, I demand the instant return of my niece! You have basely abused my hospitality and your friendship with Thomas Clestran; and the only amends you can make is to bring her back at once to the shelter of my roof. Wearied though my poor horse is by your misconduct, I have ordered my carriage to take you to-night to Ochil Castle and fetch her back; and in spite of my indisposition I shall accompany you."

"My dear Mrs Strynd, I—I don't understand a single word you say," gasped Dunsappie. "I haven't taken your niece anywhere. I know

nothing about her—on my honour, I don't. What d'ye mean?"

"You actually deny that you have taken Miss Cheyne away with you?"

"Course I do!" said Dunsappie indignantly. "I ne—never did any such thing!"

Though his head had benefited greatly by the long drive, there was yet a trifling thickness in his voice that aroused Mrs Strynd's anger still further.

"You have also been drinking!" she exclaimed.

"I have been drinking," he admitted; "but not much, and not also. I haven't done anything else, 'cept go home on most important business."

"And you mean to tell me you went alone?" Sir Andrew hesitated.

"Ah!" said she.

"I gave a lift to a young man," he admitted.

"What young man?"

"I gave my word not to say anything about it."

"I do not believe you," she declared with emphasis.

"You doubt my word—the word of a Dunsappie?"

"I am sorry to say, Sir Andrew, I do."

"Very well," he replied. "I shall pack my

things and leave ins'tly. My word never was doubted before."

"Do you give me your word, as a man of honour, that Miss Cheyne is not at Ochil Castle—that you did not take her away with you?"

"I give my solemn word of honour I did not," said Dunsappie, with all the solemnity his words implied. "D'ye mean to say she isn't in this house?"

Mrs Strynd handed him Barbara's note.

"She ran away this evening," she replied, "leaving this message."

"Well, I'm blowed!" exclaimed the baronet. "This is the most extraor'nary thing I've ever heard!"

Still Mrs Strynd was far from satisfied.

"What business took you to Ochil?" she asked.

"Private business, I assure you."

"When did you get a message summoning you?"

This time Dunsappie was fairly nonplussed.

"It came into my head," he replied with a great air of dignity, though only at the end of a less dignified hesitancy.

"We will start for Ochil Castle as soon as you are ready," said Mrs Strynd.

But the prospect of a long drive with this unreasonable lady, and a subsequent ransacking

of his mansion, was more than the baronet could endure.

"I shall cert'nly leave as soon as you like," he said, "but you needn't trouble to come. I didn't drive to Ochil—only to the station; and if I did take Miss Cheyne, she is off by train."

Furious with indignation, he hurried off to pack his portmanteau. His last words were intended merely as a final retort, but all of a sudden they took a new significance. One suit of clothes was missing, and in their place he found a little slip of paper with the words, "Clothes will be returned later."

Then, while marvelling over this fresh mystery, a recollection came into his mind, a recollection of the trousers worn by the unknown young man. He had noticed them as the young man got out of the trap, and thought they were remarkably like an old suit of his own. And then, on the top of that, came into his mind the strangely familiar voice in which the young man had spoken one sentence.

"By Jove!" he murmured, and in a moment shook with a silent fit of laughter. Had Barbara seen the way he bore the discovery of her deceit, a load would have been lifted from her conscience. But his mirth quickly fled before the thought of the wrath to come.

"What the devil will Clestran say?" he re-

flected. "Hang it, I was supposed to keep an eye on her! Oh Lord! the quicker I'm out of this place the better."

And in a remarkably short space of time he was on his way to Ochil Castle, feeling uncomfortably like a criminal with justice at his heels. His only consolation was that Mrs Strynd so far accepted his statements as to deem her presence futile.

Behind him he left a house devastated as by a volcano. Indeed, I almost think Mrs Strynd would sooner have had Mont Pélée rain fire upon her than suffer this social calamity. And when the next morning brought Tilly home again, there was small comfort to be had from her eldest daughter's comments.

"I'm not surprised," she said. "Mr Clestran ought to have made up his mind whether he meant to celebrate a wedding or run a reformatory. Doing two things at once, dear mamma, is always dangerous."

Rose had even more cause to lament her sister's unsympathetic nature. The first moment she got her alone, Tilly said outright—

"You helped her, I suppose."

"Tilly!" cried her outraged sister.

"Where has she gone?" asked Tilly relentlessly.

"How do you suppose I know?"

"You'd better invent some consoling tale for Thomas. He will come to you at once, of course," suggested Tilly.

But, with an indignant toss of her head, Rose beat as dignified a retreat as she could.

That was in fact the question she had been asking herself continually—how to face Thomas Clestran. At any moment he might arrive and open that sealed letter, and she would have to meet his piercing eyes and hide her guilt, and yet show her sympathy and her charming nature. Poor Rose! Duplicity was not so easy a path as she had fancied, or, rather, it was a road that she suddenly found she could not step out of when she pleased to wander in fairer fields; and to make her follow it when she wanted to be honest again was so unfair of fate. All that day and all Saturday she awaited his coming in fear and trembling, and devoutly was she thankful when each night fell without word of him. Yet even her thankfulness was marred by a fresh worry,—what had become of him? He was two days overdue.

Another thing was also harassing her mind. Barbara had promised to write as soon as she got safely to London, and at the time Rose thought nothing would be easier than to get her letter unobserved out of the mail-bag. But now

a panic-terror of discovery seized her; so on Sunday morning she rode over on her bicycle to their post-town of Balnuckie, on the chance that it lay awaiting her there.

The folk of that little red-roofed seaport had not yet come out of church when she rode up the High Street, and in the Sabbath stillness that lay upon land and sea she seemed to hear her sin tolling a loud and terrible knell in her heart. Perhaps, however, it was only the fear of discovery that made that lugubrious sound, for when she had safely stowed into her pocket a bulky letter with the London post-mark, she heard nothing more than the cheerful twittering of a lark and the gentle murmur of the sea.

As soon as she was safely out of the town, she sat down upon a bank to read the tidings of the runaway. But as it was a very lengthy letter, it had better have a chapter to itself.

CHAPTER XIV.

BARBARA'S LETTER.

This letter of Barbara's was written on the paper of a London hotel, and it ran thus:—

“DEAREST ROSE,—I am in a terrible fix, partly funny, partly tragic—or at least I'm sure *you* would think it tragic enough if you were in it. And indeed it takes even me all my time to see anything humorous in my position. But first, perhaps, I had better begin at the beginning, and tell you how all the mischief has happened.

“I won't say much about the drive, because I feel too penitent whenever I think of the *horrid* way I treated poor Sir Andrew. He was rather tipsy, and *very* funny—but oh, my dear, so kind and obliging and nice. I treated him shamefully making such a use of him (and such a fool of him!), and if some day you ever get a chance, I hope you'll tell him so from me.

“Well, we got safely to the station, and if ever you want to feel ashamed of yourself just steal a suit of Sir Andrew Dunsappie's clothes and walk about Rango platform in them! Not

that I walked a step more than I could help : instead, I sat on a bench in the darkest part of the station and tucked my feet under it, and studied the asphalt till I almost learned how to manufacture it. Of course I only took a third-class ticket, as I have to make my £10 go as far as they can ; and when the train came in, *of course* all the thirds were full of passengers. I squeezed myself between two stout women who were coming back from a wedding somewhere. Right opposite to me sat their men-folk,—another stout individual with a strong accent and a lot of wedding breakfast still clinging to him. His name was ‘Jamie,’ and his nature offensive beyond description.

“Everybody in the carriage having in turn been favoured with his conversation, he turned a great fat eye at last upon me.

“ ‘Gaun far, sir?’ he inquired.

“I cannot tell you how flattered I felt to be addressed as ‘Sir’ ; actually I was mistaken for a *gentleman* !

“I really must have more cheek than I imagined, for I told him with great coolness that I was going to London.

“ ‘Ay, indeed?’ he said. ‘Umphm’ (or however you spell ‘that auld Scotch word umphm’).

“He then proceeded to ask me if I came from London. Was I English? Was I

Scotch? What part of Scotland I lived in? And I all the time getting redder and redder, and feeling all the eyes in the carriage being turned upon me, till at last I could stand it no longer and stopped answering him.

"Then he got rude, and began criticising my appearance in a loud tone to the company generally.

"'Yin of your stuck-up kind, this felli'; gie's hissel' as muckle airs as if he'd been a decent-sized man. Fine leddies' boots he's got. What for is he no' travelling first-class? Naebody wants him here, *that's* certain.'

"All the time the two women were doing their best to stop him.

"'Whist, Jamie!' they'd say.

"But all the answer they got was—

"'Haud your ain whist! "A man's a man for a' that," and a'm no gaun to stand airs and graces wi' me.'

"Airs and graces! and me ready to drop through the floor with fright!

"I'm afraid you'll think, from the length of this screed about Jamie, that I ended by running away with him. Well, as a matter of fact, I did end by running away *from* him, so that really he was the cause of my fix. When we got to Edinburgh I simply bolted out of the carriage, hastily bought a rug at the bookstall, got into

the London train, and sat on pins and needles till it started for fear he should come to carry out his threat of 'learning me to be impudent to him.'

"But we started safely, and I was beginning to feel a little more comfortable with a rug wrapped decently round my knees, and only a respectable-looking minister besides myself in the compartment, when it struck me I'd like to eat some cake. I looked round for my bag, and imagine my horror—I'd left it in the other train!

"Oh, Rose, if it hadn't been for the minister and Sir Andrew's clothes, I could have cried. I was simply stupefied. I hadn't a thing in the world except the clothes I'd on. Luckily I had my purse in my pocket, or I think I'd have jumped out of the window there and then. Was ever any one in such a silly, horrible predicament?

"But now I've written so much about the first part of my adventures that I must hurry on. Between Edinburgh and London there was nothing much to tell of. The minister tried to open a conversation with me, but I shut my eyes and pretended to fall asleep. Then three men came in at York and began talking about racing. Their language was not very polished, and I tried to keep asleep and

not to hear them ; but, my dear, I'm afraid I learned more about how to—well—confound my bad luck than I ought. Perhaps if I go on as I've begun it will come in useful some day.

“At last we reached King's Cross at a very chilly and early hour, and I took a cab and told the man to drive me to some quiet family hotel. The streets were very grey and empty and dreary—very, very dismal after dear old Scotland ; and I began to wish I were back again, and even to wonder whether it was really necessary to have gone away at all. But something has happened since then which showed me that it was *absolutely* necessary, and given me besides a horrible fright.

“I got a room at the hotel, and after a little went down to get breakfast in the coffee-room, for I was so hungry by this time I didn't care what risks I ran. Just as I was at the door of the room—thank goodness, with my cap still on—it opened and *he* came out ! Rose, I nearly fainted. He actually is staying in this same hotel, and hasn't started north again yet. His letter to me was written from his club, so I had no idea where he was living. Imagine how I felt !

“He looked at me hard—I *felt* him looking at me—and then went on without recognising me. You may be sure I didn't give him a

second chance. I fled back to my room, had some tea and toast and two eggs there (what they call a *plain* breakfast, and it certainly isn't very much of a meal), and now I am simply writing such a wearisome long screed to you because I'm afraid to venture out. Of course I shall have to, pretty soon, but I shan't feel safe again till I am under the shelter of the Harlows' roof. What they will think of me appearing in this disguise I'm sure I don't know, but that can't be helped now. You have no conception how I dread that man. I had begun to think I didn't, but now I know I do most heartily. He is like a huge machine that works on relentlessly, quite independent of feelings or sentiments or affections or anything human. I don't believe he cares a bit for me; he has just made up his mind to marry me on principle (*what* principle goodness knows!), and I believe he would take me to church drugged rather than have his system break down.

"Rose, dear, forgive this rigmarole of gush and confessions and all the things I hate most, but I have no one else to write to, and you have been a dear good cousin to me. Lots of love, and more thanks than I can say for helping me. I only trust no one has suspected your share in the extraordinary disappearance of a young lady.
—Your affectionate cousin, BARBARA."

When Rose came to the end she felt as though she had been reading a novel with the last chapter left out. Had *he* discovered her, or had she reached her friends? Where at this moment were those two so lately on the eve of their marriage: especially, where was *he*?

Very slowly, and with a troubled mind, she rode back to Fogo.

CHAPTER XV.

ADRIFT.

This history must now take a step backwards, from the receiving to the posting of that letter. The scene must change too, and not for the better: instead of sunshine and salt breezes, a chilly, hazy morning; instead of green fields and the illimitable sea, a narrow street of smoke-smutted brick houses paved with muddy wood and filled with thin mist and the deep buzz of London town.

In a room looking into this street Barbara sat with the letter in her hand, wondering whether she might venture out now. She had paid her bill and made up her mind to start a dozen times, but always put it off. Supposing after all

her trouble she fell into *his* hands! Her blood froze at the thought. But if she waited too long her friend Eva might have gone out by the time she reached her house, and how could she tell her story to any other ears? So, furtively and swiftly, she made her way along a corridor where a couple of housemaids almost frightened her back by stopping their work to stare, went through the hall at a pace that bore such a close resemblance to a run that the porter stared even harder than the maids, and only ventured to breathe when she was leaning back in the corner of a cab which bore her through the traffic towards South Kensington and her friend.

She had never before been in this wonderful, moving, seething London; never watched coloured files of 'buses trot by; never seen these inconceivable hosts of hansom and fabulous myriads of people. All these new sights and sounds would have been a continuous entertainment had her thoughts been free to enjoy them; but there ran only one idea in her mind—to get safely to her journey's end as swiftly as horse could trot. They turned out of the busy thoroughfares into the aristocratic calm of white and red and yellow squares and soberly exclusive-looking streets. Then with a start of joy she read the name of the street she was seeking, "Philaster Terrace," in unmistakable blue-and-

white letters, and a minute later they had stopped before Number 22—also, she smiled to see, distinctly marked. The cab jingled away, and she was on the door-step, trying to compose herself and pass as a real man for a few minutes longer. The danger was passed : nothing now to be faced but the embarrassment of an explanation, and that could be carried off in laughter. She rang the bell, and then in a little rang again, but the Harlows' servants seemed either very dilatory or very deaf. A third time she rang, and then with a rising sensation of terror stepped back and glanced up at the house. Every blind was down.

At that moment the door at last opened and an untidy woman peered out.

"Is Miss Eva Harlow at home?" asked Barbara, in a voice that seemed to her to belong to some one else, it was so strangled, and she felt so sure of the answer.

"No, sir; none of them ain't at 'ome. Mr Harlow was took ill, and 'as gone abroad."

"And the rest of the family?"

"Gone with 'im, and won't be 'ome till June."

The woman waited for a moment, but as the visitor seemed to find nothing further to say, the door banged again, and Barbara was left standing on a South Kensington door-step, with seven pound ten in the pocket of Sir

Andrew Dunsappie's trousers, and in her head just one fragment of an idea trying to keep itself coherent in the cataclysm,—that she must not fall into the hands of Thomas Clestran.

How she spent the next half hour she herself never had any clear memory. She could afterwards recall crossing a street in a spasm of shame to avoid meeting a young man ; getting into a cab and leaving it again hurriedly because she caught the driver looking through the window in the roof ; and at last mounting to the top of an omnibus and screening her immodesty beneath the tarpaulins they keep for wet weather. But from thence she was driven by a girl, who kept casting a black eye in her direction, till Barbara felt sure she had guessed her shameful secret. A quite different explanation struck her later, but on that morning she had room for nothing in her mind but a great terror of discovery and a blinding shame for her disguise.

When she left the 'bus and found herself in crowded dizzy space, which afterwards she learned was Piccadilly Circus, the shame had almost overcome the terror. It was at this point that her wits began to clear a little, and both the poignancy and the needs of her situation came home to her, and the rest of her first day in London never faded from her memory.

First she must dress herself decently, and, having made up her mind what she wanted before the windows of a huge ladies' outfitting establishment, she got as far as the door confidently enough. But all that day she got no farther. Women, nothing but women inside. How could a young man venture into that throng and deliberately order and carry away the clothes she needed? Twice or thrice she tried to screw up her courage and defy the curious staring eyes that everywhere greeted her, but each time it grew harder, till at last it was impossible to face such an unbearable ordeal. So she wandered aimlessly along the pavements, like the Barbara of a horrible dream. Indeed it was difficult to believe that she was really awake and herself. As when in a nightmare the solid ground melts, and stone houses shrink or sprout up to the heavens, and people grow a beard and change their identity before your eyes, and all things in nature violate the laws that have for ever ruled them, so in the presence of this perversion she felt a numbing, unspeakable horror. Was she doomed always and for ever after to wear this loathsome dress and wander blindly through the streets of London, cut off from either sex, a monster by itself? There seemed to her bewildered brain no way of ever escaping.

Poor, grey-eyed Barbara, with her brown hair ruthlessly cut short by her own rash hands and her sentence of outlawry signed by herself; there was no soul in London more utterly forlorn than she. As the day wore on she grew so footsore and weary that once or twice she stumbled as she walked. And she was very hungry, too. A bun and a glass of milk that she had hastily eaten standing by a tea-room counter was all she had had since her early breakfast; and now it was afternoon. To sit down somewhere and sob,—that was the one womanly longing which possessed her. Yes, it was a far cry from the best bedroom at Fogo House with the scent of honeysuckle coming through the window, and the North Sea breaking along the friendly Scottish coast.

CHAPTER XVI.

BARBARA LANDS ON A STRANGE SHORE.

Rash and inexperienced as this poor wanderer was, and cruelly as fate had taken advantage of her errors, there was yet deep in her heart a blind tenacity of purpose that up till now had kept her courage from entirely sinking. At last

it was all but burned out; half an hour more of this and she would have thrown herself into any hands willing to tend her. She might be sent back to be absorbed finally into the pitiless system, but no longer did liberty seem worth the having. And then occurred an incident that can only have been a most strange coincidence, but which afterwards seemed to her to have an origin more determinate than that. Like a sudden fright to a tired horse, it roused her sharply to her spirited self.

By devious ways she had wandered into the Strand, and had gone nearly to the eastern end, when she came to a place where the pavement was blocked and people had to go round by a narrow path between a hoarding and a temporary rail. In the middle of this, where no escape was possible, she came face to face with two men, and the foremost of these was Mr Thomas Clestran of Pittentrews.

So faint was she by this time that for the moment her courage fled from her completely, but with a firm step and an unheeding eye her affianced husband brushed past her, never stopping to glance at her twice. Evidently he was deep in conversation with the other, a middle-aged gentleman of professional appearance; for just as he went by her he turned his head and said, as if in answer to a question—

“No! My mind is made up. I shall listen to no compromise. Either he relinquishes——”

But that was all she heard. They hastened on, and vanished in the crowd of the street.

As for Barbara, she hastened too, and this time without a stumble. For the moment her weariness and her shame were gone. She even felt a thrill of thankfulness for this grotesque disguise. At least she was safe in it, and safe from that man she meant to keep. Freedom at any price became her single thought, and it was with an instinctive fear of the dangers that lay in meeting so many people that she took the first turning out of the Strand, and breathed more easily when, after another turn, she found herself in a narrow lane overlooked by the timbered gables of two or three ancient houses, and on the other side by a long range of old and dingy building. It was a mere slit of a street that seemed to run out of a region of slums. At the farther end she saw a peep of traffic; and after debating the point for a few moments, she came to the conclusion that she would venture along to see what thoroughfare that was. But when she had come to the middle of the long dingy building, she was suddenly arrested by a strange and refreshing glimpse. Through an archway she found her-

self looking into a quiet court, like a college quadrangle, with a garden and trees and a flock of peaceful pigeons, all most restful to behold. Above the arch was inscribed in stone lettering the words, "Our Lady's Inn."

As she stood there feasting her eyes, one or two men passed in and out, quickly and evidently intent on their business; and so, since it seemed a public place, and was evidently not an inn in the usual sense of the word, she ventured with a hesitating step beneath the arch. The pleasant glimpse widened as she advanced; but now her eyes were arrested by something else. This was a card hung out beside the door of what seemed a porter's lodge, and on the card was written, "Offices and Chambers to let. Apply within." Supposing she found refuge in an office or a chamber here? Perhaps it was the gentle and suggestive name, "Our Lady's Inn," that first put the idea into her head. To her it seemed to come as an inspiration; and even as it came there appeared in the doorway of the lodge an immensely corpulent and exceedingly important-looking man, who cast a glance upon her that she felt certain meant to say, "Do you want an office or a chamber?"

"Who does one apply to?" she asked in a sudden access of assurance that amazed herself both then and ever afterwards.

The corpulent man looked her up and down and breathed heavily and audibly.

"To me," he replied in a tone that seemed to signify reproof for an obtuseness that required this self-evident information.

"Have you any to let?" she inquired.

He waddled up to the card, and pointed a great fat finger towards it.

"Offices and chambers to let," he repeated. "If they wasn't to let, what would be the use o' saying that?"

Barbara felt damped, but not entirely dismayed.

"How much do you charge?" she asked.

"That depends on what you wants. Is it an office or a set o' chambers?"

"Chambers," she said boldly, though what exactly this term implied she was not at all sure.

"Furnished or unfurnished?"

"Oh, furnished, please."

"We always lets 'em unfurnished as a rule," he replied. "But there does happen to be an uncommon fine set o' furnished ones going now, the gentleman having gone to Americy for three months, and being willing for to have them inhabited."

"Can I see them?" asked Barbara.

"Yes, sir, you can," said the corpulent man, suddenly producing a "sir" now that business apparently was meant.

He fetched a bunch of keys out of the lodge (for he was no less a person than the head-porter of Our Lady's Inn) and led her across the quadrangle to a corner staircase. It was a very quaint and strange place, Barbara thought as she followed him; so still and cloistered after the crowded streets, such a peaceful backwater to drift into from the tumultuous currents outside. And the stair was very unlike any other stair she had ever seen. At the bottom were painted a number of names:—

Ground Floor.

Mr TODKINS.

Mr CLARENCE.

First Floor.

Mr E. SELLAR.

Mr ATKINSON-STICKITT.

Second Floor.

Mr HILL.

Below Mr Hill's name another was written in pencil, but as she passed she could not quite make out what it was. The stair itself, up which all these gentlemen trod to their offices and chambers, was made of wood, and it had a carved wooden banister, and zigzagged round a

great solid wooden post that stretched from the very top of the house down to the bottom, and consisted of nothing less than half a tree hollowed out and painted dull red.

The corpulent porter led her up past doors with the names of Mr Todkins, and Mr Clarence, and Mr Sellar, and Mr Atkinson-Stickitt painted over them, till they reached the second floor. There the stair ended beside the door of Mr Hill. The porter took out his keys and threw it open, and Barbara followed him into these furnished chambers that were to let.

"If you asks *me*, sir," he said, "you can't get no nicer rooms in town. You has them all to yourself, cooks your own dinner if so minded, shuts the door on troublesome customers and they can't get in, not if they was a Member of Parliament, and does *what* you pleases and *when* you pleases."

They looked indeed so comfortable, and these advantages were so tempting, and the thought of going out into the streets so abhorrent, that there and then she engaged them in her heart.

"What is the rent?" she asked.

"Mr Hill he expects a pound a-week, and I calls that *cheap*, sir. You wouldn't get the like o' these rooms in the West End—not for five pounds."

But the woman that was inside the late Mr

Strynd's topcoat saw no reason why they should not be obtained even cheaper if possible.

"I don't mind giving fifteen shillings," she said, with as careless an air as she could muster.

The porter's huge and stolid countenance strove hard to express the contempt he felt for such an avaricious spirit; but as Mr Hill had been gone for three weeks, and this was the first application, the negotiations ended in Barbara entering on a weekly tenancy at a rent of fifteen shillings.

"When do you want to come in?" he asked.

"Now," said Barbara.

"Without no luggage?"

"Oh, of course," she said hastily; "I had better get it from the station, hadn't I?"

The head-porter's manner became caution itself.

"We expects the first week's rent in advance," he observed.

She promptly pulled out a sovereign, and then, by a happy inspiration, requested him to keep the change. A remarkable difference became apparent in his manner. As head-porter of Our Lady's Inn it was beneath his dignity to express verbal thanks for this tribute to his office, but the huge forefinger moved sufficiently far in the direction of his forehead to suggest a compromise between a salute and a benediction, and suspicion was replaced by kindly patronage. The next thing to be done, he told

her, was to obtain the services of an official whom he termed a "laundress." Considering the extent of her present wardrobe, Barbara saw no pressing hurry for such a functionary, till she learned that washing was the one thing the laundress did not do.

"There's no other servants kep' here but just the laundresses," her patron explained. "I'll send up Mrs Muffet; you couldn't be in no better hands. Does for Mr Sellar and Mr Stickitt and Mr Lesley, and Mr Green in Number 2, she does. Just you leave it to me, sir."

Mrs Muffet, by good luck, happened at that moment to be crossing the quadrangle, and a few minutes later the porter had sent her up to the new tenant.

"People certainly don't grow thin here," Barbara thought when she saw her. And indeed the good Mrs Muffet, though a lightweight compared with the corpulent porter, was of an exceeding matronly presence. But instead of the porter's gross and formidable aspect, she had a rosy motherly face that comforted Barbara more than anything she had seen all that day. If only her head had not suddenly begun to throb so and her weariness returned to crush her spirit, she would have tried to keep this honest countenance beside her and listen to the puzzling cockney voice and feel for a little less lonely.

But she could scarcely understand what Mrs Muffet said, and her answers grew confused and her manner absent. Without attention she listened to a long account of how Mr Hill conducted his menage, at what hours he rose, went to bed and had breakfast, and what creature comforts he kept in his rooms.

"Then, sir, if you're agreeable I'll call you at 'alf-past eight, same as Mr 'Ill, and two boiled eggs for breakfast and a loaf of bread and butter and a cup o' tea, and set the 'ot water boiling for shaving, and Mr 'Ill 'as a morning paper, —'e takes the 'Telegraph.' Will you 'ave the 'Telegraph,' sir?"

"Yes, please," said Barbara mechanically. "I mean, no thank you, Mrs Muffet."

"Just as you likes, sir; and I'll make up the bed before I leaves the Inn if you ain't in no 'urry, as I 'as to do Mr Lesley's rooms now. And you ain't wanting nothing more now, sir? About nine o'clock, sir, I'll come and do the bed; and nothing more, sir, you ain't wanting now?"

Barbara would have liked to have cried—

"Yes, your company!"

But instead she murmured—

"Nothing else, thanks."

And one after the other the two outer doors shut behind Mrs Muffet, and she was left alone in Number 6 Our Lady's Inn.

CHAPTER XVII.

MAN FRIDAY.

Man Friday

At first, when she was left to herself, Barbara sat before the newly lighted fire and tried to think. But that was no use; her thoughts were all in a tangle, and out of the medley she could not pick a single cheerful one to solace her. So she jumped up, and with a very brave and brisk air that endured for almost five full minutes, set about inspecting her new home. And this was the fashion of it: a sitting-room, small in size, square save for one lopped-off corner in which was the fireplace, and panelled from ceiling to floor in yellow-painted wood-work, a cheerful hue that even on the murkiest days seemed to hold an odd sunbeam. Two windows with red curtains looked into the quadrangle; against the walls stood a writing-desk, a bookcase, and a sideboard all of black oak, and a sofa less æsthetic but exceedingly comfortable. In the middle was a round table with a blue cloth, a little soiled and spotted with candle-grease and very much littered with old magazines and books, but still showing evidence of having been a highly self-respecting tablecloth once. On the walls hung any number of pictures of all sorts,

sizes, and descriptions—a regular odd lot: photographs, amateur water-colours, engravings old and modern, a framed set out of a picture-book—everything, in fact, that could look moderately well, and yet cost little. Everywhere else that presented a level surface were strewn and propped pipes, photographs, a ball of string, ash-trays, and all the litter that form a bachelor's household gods. Evidently Mr Hill had taken no trouble to put his rooms in order preparatory to letting them, and as evidently the good Mrs Muffet was altogether lacking in any weakness for redding up. Yet it all gave an atmosphere of habitation that insensibly comforted Barbara a little.

Next she turned to explore the bedroom. This was a more spacious chamber, opening straight out of the sitting-room without any superfluous passages or other waste of space, and simply, almost severely, furnished—or at least it seemed so to a woman's eye. The window looked into a gloomy little area surrounded by the backs of dingy poverty-stricken dwellings, poor offshoots from Drury Lane, and she turned her eyes from that prospect with a sinking of her heart—it was so foreign, and so sordid. At the other end of the room a narrow space had been partitioned off to serve as kitchen, pantry, or scullery, just as you chose to

regard it. It contained a gas cooking-stove, a shelf, a few cans and pails and brushes, and a tall press where she was delighted to find such an assortment of plates and cups and knives and forks and other necessities as might serve for any variety of meal.

"Well," she said to herself, "things might be worse after all. If only I had some clothes!"

There was a long mirror in the door of the wardrobe, and she stood before this and tried to see herself as she must seem to others.

"Really, I am not such a guy as I thought!" she exclaimed. "The trousers are certainly a little too long, and—oh dear, my collar is dirty! And this cap isn't at all becoming; but the overcoat's not so bad, and I *do* look like a gentleman—anybody would say that, I'm sure they would. I wish Aunt Jane could see me—just for two minutes, and then be whisked off again!"

She began to laugh at the notion, and having once begun could scarcely stop again, but shook with a silly hysterical laughter that left her weak and dizzy when at last it passed away. A little frightened and hazily surprised, she went back to the sitting-room and threw herself on the sofa.

"I'm not going to be ill in this place!" she thought; and then suddenly remembered that she had hardly eaten anything all day.

"That must be the reason," she said to herself.

"I'll see whether there is anything eatable left in these rooms ; even sugar would be something."

But there was not even a lump of sugar, Mrs Muffet having provided against anything spoiling by cleaning the cupboard after Mr Hill's departure. Dare she venture out to a restaurant? Not yet, anyhow, she decided, and lay down on the sofa again ; and once she was there it quickly became far too great an exertion even to contemplate going out into the streets. When Mrs Muffet came in to make up the bed she would get her to bring in some provisions, and in the meantime she would go to sleep. She closed her eyes and dozed off for some unknown space of time ; then—tramp, tramp, tramp, louder and louder, a heavy step creaked and stamped up the wooden stair. She started up in a tremble of apprehension. The steps creaked just outside her door, and then came a soft "whit!" and tramp, tramp, the footsteps descended again.

"Lighting the gas!" she said with a long sigh of relief, and tried to fall asleep again. But even that friend had now deserted her, and there began a vigil that often afterwards returned to haunt her. Evening had fallen while she slept, and on the darkening ceiling the fire-light cast shifting rays, and a lamp in the square outside threw a steady beam. The rest of the

room was filled with shadows, strange shadows thrown by unfamiliar furniture, that kept her dreamily puzzling what they might be. Occasionally steps crunched on the gravel beneath the windows, and very faintly she could just hear the steady unbroken hum of London. But for all that it was singularly still in her new abode,—a little too still, she thought. There was not even a clock to listen to, nothing to keep her thoughts from whirling all over and round the things that might happen.

“Am I really myself?” she kept wondering, till the thought began to disturb her strangely, and she tried to fix her attention on the place she was in. But that only put more grotesque fancies into her head. This building was so ancient, and so many generations of men had lived, and perhaps died, in these very rooms, that soon she began to wonder if she was actually alone in them now. Supposing a panel in the old wainscoting was to open, and *something* was to come out! Or supposing while she slept something had come out and was lurking all this time in one of those strange black shadows! Yet she was not really afraid, for her nerve was at all times good, and now her head was too light and giddy to apprehend the very fantasies it conjured up. Next she wondered whether she had any real living neigh-

bours on this stair. Not on this storey, she thought, for she had observed no other door, and there was no floor above her. And, now she came to think of it, Mrs Muffet had mentioned that the rooms below were offices, and not chambers. So she would spend the nights utterly cut off from human intercourse, practically in a house by herself. At this thought she did begin to grow a little nervous. Were these outer doors quite secure? The porter had given her a key, so apparently they had to be unlocked to get in; but all the same she must examine them carefully. Yet not now: the thought of moving off the sofa was the most repugnant of all.

Tramp, tramp, tramp again, the steps growing more quickly louder than before. Evidently a more active somebody coming up. They reached the top, passed her door, and continued for a few paces farther. Then a bunch of keys rattled, a door opened and shut, and she could catch faint sounds of some one moving about in a room hard by. So there was another set of chambers on this floor, and she had a neighbour after all! And now she remembered the name in pencil beneath Mr Hill's, the name she had not been able to read. Who was he? For of course it was a man: no women seemed to live in this place, despite its name. And how could she avoid him most completely? Far

better have been utterly alone, she thought now. Loneliness, after all, was an imaginary trouble, but this was a dangerous reality. For a little while she pursued these new reflections, and then sleep came back to her again.

Away, swiftly away, went her mind to the sea-beach and the Scottish coasts, and for a while she had some rest and refreshment in her dreams. So fast asleep had she fallen that when at last she woke with a start at the call of some clamorous disturbance, she doubted whether it had not been part of her dream. For a moment she lay awake, observing that the fire was black out, feeling horribly chilly and desperately hungry, and hearing nothing to account for her awakening; and then—rat-tat-tat! came a smart firm knocking at her door. Her first thought was to lie still and silent; her second that it must be Mrs Muffet returned to make the bed. She jumped up, staggered dizzily for an instant, and then picked her way through the darkness and opened the door. But it was not Mrs Muffet who stood without.

There she was, a fugitive in search of solitude and concealment, deeply conscious and ashamed of her unwomanly disguise, confronted by a strange young man whose polite manner indicated some friendly overture.

“May I come in?” he said. “I am your

next-door neighbour, and I heard of your coming from the worthy Mrs Muffet, our mutual attendant. As a friend of Hill's, I thought perhaps I might be able to lend you a kettle or something, don't you know."

There was something so engaging and entirely friendly in his address, and she was so utterly confused and taken aback, that, instead of firmly turning him away, she could only murmur—

"Thank you, it is very kind——"

And then before she realised what was happening her neighbour was within her refuge.

"Been asleep?" he asked with a smile, striking a match and, without waiting to ask for permission, lighting the gas.

Both resentment and alarm began to fill Barbara's mind.

"I was, till you disturbed me," she replied.

He was visibly surprised at this unfriendly retort, but apparently regarded it as the pettishness of a very young man, for he answered in the same polite friendly tone—

"Sorry for disturbing you, but, may I ask, have you dined?"

"I don't want any dinner, thank you," she answered frigidly.

"Better have some, all the same."

"I have a headache," she explained in the same distant tone.

OUR LADY'S INN

"Do it good," he replied, smiling and twisting a trim little moustache, with provoking indifference to her displeasure.

She was keeping the table between them, so that only her top half was visible to his unhallowed gaze, and all the time her grey eyes were forming a more and more complete impression of the intruder. He was above middle-height, and well set up though slender, with a face that she could not but admit was both good-looking and unusual enough to be worth glancing at twice. What its total impression was she could not for some time afterwards decide, for the elements were incongruous : a heavy mop of straight black hair, parted almost over one ear and then brushed flat across a high forehead ; a pair of bright, restless, dark eyes ; a trim little moustache that contrasted oddly with the mobile lips beneath it ; and a complexion pallid, it seemed to her, rather through want of fresh air than design of nature. On the whole the expression was pleasant ; indeed he had not ceased to smile since he entered the room, and the chief fault she found was that this smile had an amused, half patronising quality, as though he found this boy rather an absurd lad. As, in fact, he did.

Not having been accustomed to have men look at her in this way, it was in a yet more aloof voice that she asked—

"Did you come to tell me this?"

He only laughed and answered—

"I beg your pardon for my unfortunate bluntness, but to tell you the honest truth, Mrs Muffet took it into her head that you were a little seedy, so I thought I'd come in and see."

"Are you a doctor, then?" she asked.

"Unfortunately, no," he replied, either not observing or not heeding the sarcasm; "but if you need one, I can easily get him for you. Shall I?"

"No, thank you," she said, though in a gentler tone.

"Then why not come out and have some dinner with me?" he suggested in such a persuasive voice, that quite a new and strange feeling suddenly shot like a draught of warm air through her heart. It was compounded of gratitude and an absurd longing to accept this kindness. And she was dreadfully hungry. She looked at him not so straight and directly now, but with quite a different interest. His clothes and his manner made a curious contrast, she observed. The clothes smacked strongly of Bohemia; a very ancient and tattered shooting coat with two well-worn leather patches on the shoulders, a low collar with a tie tied in a large loose bow; waistcoat and trousers of different colours, and, like the coat, shabbily genteel;

the most disreputable pair of pumps she had ever seen or imagined, and through the holes in them a glimpse of blue sock on the right foot and brown sock on the left. His manners, on the other hand, suggested an agreeable marquis, or at least what she imagined an agreeable marquis to be like,—debonair, assured, and polite to the verge of exaggeration. She said to herself it was the oddest contrast she had ever seen.

“Come,” he repeated, “you are simply starving yourself; that’s what is the matter with you.”

“Really, I don’t want any dinner,” she persisted, but rather in a pleading than a resentful or convincing voice.

All this time she was thinking that this was a face she could surely trust, and that she was ravenously hungry. Only she could never venture outside.

“Well, then, come in and have some coffee and cake with me. It’s too devilish cold to stay here.”

As Barbara hesitated, he came up to her and laid his hand upon her arm. A pitiful moving spectacle of a poor shy lad she seemed to him; and such a pretty boy, too. His manner became almost caressing.

“Overlook my old socks, and forgive the want of an introduction, and come along.”

As the reader may have gathered, there was a strong dash of audacity in Barbara's composition that every now and then broke out in the most surprising way. She shook her arm free, though not roughly, and answered with a sudden access of readiness that seemed to surprise her new friend—

“All right, thank you very much ; I'll come.”

As they went out he turned and closed her outer door behind them, remarking—

“Always shut your oak when you go out : never safe to leave it open. Mrs Muffet has a key, you know.”

And Barbara felt strangely pleased at being thus looked after.

She now saw that a short landing ran back at the other side of the stairs with a door at the end of it, solid and studded with heavy nails. He opened this, and upon the very first evening of her solitary concealment she found herself, of her own freewill, boldly entering a strange young man's apartments. For a moment the thought of what Aunt Jane, or any sensible person, would say, what she herself would say at any other time, came vividly into her mind. But sharp hunger is a wonderful cure for the conventions, and into the unknown's rooms she stepped and heard his door clang behind her.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE ADVENTURE CONTINUED.

The chambers in which Barbara now found herself looked bare, ill-furnished, and untidy after her own. The sitting-room was larger than hers, but that served only to make it appear the more empty; and the table, the two or three chairs, the bookcase, and a huge oak chest which were its only furniture, had all of them passed the prime of life, while the litter of papers and pipes and books was so egregious that, starving as she was, she could scarcely restrain herself from attempting a brief tidy-up.

And here again she was struck with curious contrasts. Quite a dozen books were strewn about, so her neighbour must be given to reading, yet the bookcase itself was almost empty. The pictures were few, but at least two of them looked valuable engravings. The big chest was dilapidated, yet it was a rare old piece of oak. And, most singular of all, a magnificent pair of high antique silver candlesticks, massive and quaint in design, stood upon the mantel-shelf and lit the room.

“He is a poor man, but wasn’t once,” was her

first thought. "Yet why should he have only kept his silver candlesticks and two pictures?"

While she was making these observations, her host had retired through a door at the farther end of the room, and now he returned carrying a sauce-pan and a coffee-pot.

"You'll have some buttered eggs, I hope?" he remarked. "I cook 'em rather artistically."

"Oh, please don't trouble for me!" she exclaimed, though the very sound of them did her good.

"No trouble,—I want some myself," he replied.

"Haven't you had dinner?" she asked, for she had just observed that the time was half-past eight o'clock, and concluded that her host's suggestion of dining was intended for her alone.

"I've had something," he said evasively.

"I'm sure I am keeping you from dinner!" cried Barbara. "A man needs a regular dinner."

"A man?" said her host, with a laugh and a curious look at her.

Barbara's heart stood still at the horrible slip.

"He has guessed!" she thought.

"Sometimes even a full-sized man has not money in his pocket to pay for his dinner," he said in a tone which seemed to her half humorous, half chiding.

The triple thought that she had wounded his pride, nearly given herself away, and been addressed in an unnecessarily sarcastic tone, froze her frankness and sealed her lips. Finding that she scarcely deigned to answer the few casual remarks he made, he cooked the eggs and made the coffee over the fire in silence, and when these operations were finished set the results upon the table and drew up a couple of chairs.

"Now, sir, my collation is at the disposal of your appetite," he said, in that politely bantering tone she so much resented.

But at that moment she could have swallowed an insult so long as it implied a mouthful of buttered egg. A loaf of bread, a noble dish of eggs, a large cake, and two steaming cups of coffee—what could pride say in the face of these? She just ate in grateful silence, and, to tell the truth, her host seemed equally ready for the fray, so that for a time there was no need of speech, friendly or sour. But as her hunger became appeased, and her spirits rose, and her elasticity and full possession of her wits returned, she began to commune with herself a little uneasily. She had accepted this stranger's kindness, she had eaten his salt, she had put herself under an obligation to him. What next? She could not be rude or un-

grateful, yet she must get back into her proper position somehow. It would not do to leave him the very instant she had finished eating his supper, but as long as she remained in his room (twenty minutes, she decided—the minimum duration of a call) she would be reserved but friendly, polite yet not familiar.

“Now for a smoke,” he said, rising and getting a pipe. “Will you have a cigarette? I’ve got a few somewhere. Ah, here they are.”

“Thanks, I don’t smoke,” she replied politely but distantly, endeavouring to blend the attitudes she had decided on.

“Not begun yet, I suppose?” he replied with a smile that seemed to have an irritating trace of patronage.

“I don’t intend to begin.”

“Promised somebody?”

“No, I have not.”

“Well, far be it from me to beguile the young,” he answered with the same provoking air.

Barbara began to realise that to play the *rôle* she had planned was a very much harder thing to do in trousers than in petticoats. Then he would have respected her, she thought, and not treated her as an infant; but now, he behaved like an old dog with a sportive puppy.

“Won’t you take off your coat?” he asked,

as he pushed up his only easy chair towards the fire and offered it to her.

Her heart gave a flutter of alarm. The late Mr Strynd's topcoat, though only of the covert variety, came below her knees and helped greatly to ameliorate her shame, especially when she sat with her feet well tucked under her. If she were stripped of that and had to face this strange man's eyes, protected only by the fig-leaves borrowed from Sir Andrew Dunsappie, she might as well die at once! It is true he had only courteously suggested this revelation, but she recoiled as though he had tried to force it.

"No; I should sooner wear it," she exclaimed, between indignation and alarm.

"I beg your pardon," he replied; "but please remember that you are at present my guest, and that my only desire is to make you comfortable."

The perfect courtesy and suavity with which he treated her outbreak, and the slight but perceptible change which immediately came over his manner, as though he gave up all further attempts to humour this ungrateful visitor, filled the cup of Barbara's discomfort.

"I'll make him treat me differently," she said to herself hotly.

An irresistible dramatic impulse seized her, and almost as much to her own surprise as to his, she broke into a smile and said—

"I think I should like a cigarette after all."

He handed her the box, and she airily helped herself, and lit it with the assurance of an old smoker. In point of fact she knew just enough of the art to keep it alight and discharge clouds of smoke without risk of suffocation.

"I am afraid you think me very rude and ungrateful, but I'm not really, I assure you," she said with a sweetness and sincerity (so it seemed to her host) that was singularly increased by the most becoming blush ever seen on the face of modest youth.

His own face showed the advance she had made in his estimation.

"You have nothing to be grateful for," he assured her. "I was delighted to find company."

"Don't you often have company?"

"Very seldom indeed. I know your landlord, Hill—though not intimately—and sometimes see him when he is here; but since he left I've hardly had one man,—one friend that's to say," he corrected himself,—“in my rooms.”

"You don't have enemies, I hope?" she asked, with growing assurance.

He gave a curious look, not at her but at the fire.

"Enemies?" he repeated. "It is hard to classify some people."

"How would you classify me?" she asked.

His dark eyes met hers, and then for some reason both turned aside. Her thought was, so far as it could be put into words, "What have I said? I've gone too far!" His, that this was a very singular youth indeed; he seemed to be growing up under his very eyes, and yet not exactly into an ordinary man.

"I am considerably puzzled," he said frankly.

His tone gave Barbara an instant sense of relief. He was still talking as to a man, and she resolved that he should so continue.

"Puzzled by what?" she asked, looking at him as straight as he looked at her.

"About your age, your antecedents, and your honesty," he said with a laugh.

"My honesty!"

"You said just now you never smoked. Either that was not quite true or else you change your principles with suspicious rapidity."

"Well, why shouldn't I?"

"A woman's answer, I fear," he said.

Again a palpitation of her heart, and again a quick relief when he added—

"But it's my own to most awkward questions—Why the devil shouldn't one?"

Yes, undoubtedly he was talking as to a fellow-man; so much so, that she received a mild shock.

"Why the devil shouldn't one do what one

likes?" he repeated. "There are enough consistent fools and virtuous idiots and reasonable asses in the world without adding another to the number of the damned."

He glanced at her face, smiled, and changed his tone.

"You will learn nothing edifying here, I'm afraid."

"I have had quite enough edification lately," she answered with a reassuring laugh.

"And become a little tired of it?"

"Yes."

There was a pause, each furtively studying the other. Despite the disapproval of her more prudent self, Barbara was becoming decidedly interested in the conversation of this Bohemian marquis. Already he had become infinitely less formidable, and she had now set down his age as not more than twenty-five,—“Not much more than my own,” she thought, “considering that he is a man and I am a woman. I’m certainly not going to stand any more of his patronage.”

Also she was thinking that so kind a Samaritan surely could not be very demoralising company.

On his part, he was marvelling still more at the abrupt transformation that had come over their intercourse. Here he was, talking to the shy petulant boy of half an hour ago almost as

though he were an equal. There was something mysterious about his guest, something almost uncanny, and yet something unaccountably fascinating. He was such a figure of fun, with his clothes too big for him, and his girlish face and singular eyes and long and wavy hair (for in cutting it off Barbara had not the heart to clip too closely). "Who and what the deuce can he be?" he mused. "He's been in some scrape, and he's older than he looks; and after that I give him up."

At last he broke the silence.

"By the way, may I ask your name?"

Curiously enough, Barbara had never thought of this essential. A name of course she must have, and she certainly was not going to risk using her own. On the spur of the moment she irretrievably dubbed herself.

"Philip Brown," she said.

Why she chose those two words she never knew. The Philip she rather congratulated herself upon, but the Brown remained an unpleasant reminder of the necessity for foresight.

"A gentleman at large, at my service?" said he.

"Yes," she laughed, with great confidence at having slipped through this danger.

"No more questions to be asked?"

"None to be answered."

He laughed too.

"Perhaps it's as well; I can now look for a similar discretion on your part."

Though he spoke lightly he was evidently in earnest, and she felt a sense of disappointment. There were a lot of questions she would have liked to put, or at all events to hear the answers to them.

"I suppose I may ask your name?" she said.

"Lesley is my name," he answered.

He added no Christian name, and she felt that even in the guise of a man this was not a thing she could demand.

But now if she meant to retain any fraction of respect from her cooler common-sense, she must instantly take her departure.

"I'm afraid I must go," she said, rising and blushing again at this fresh reminder of her nether garments.

"Don't hurry, please!" he exclaimed.

"I must," she repeated, still lingering as the thought of those dark strange rooms suddenly came home to her.

"It's far too early," he urged.

"What time is it?" she asked.

The answer came in a most unexpected form. Out of the silence of the square a deep voice cried, in a long intoned boom—

"Pa—ast——ten!"

"What's that?" she cried.

"Our night-watchman. Don't you know that Our Lady's Inn still boasts a night-watch?"

This was romance indeed, a fitting climax to a remarkable evening. But it told her she had been in these rooms a full hour and a half.

"Good night," she said, "and thank you again very much indeed."

"I owe you the thanks for coming in; as I told you, I haven't much company here. May I look in some time to-morrow?"

For an instant she hesitated; but how could she be so rude as to order him to keep away after his kindness?

"I may be in," she said; which cautious compromise struck her as everything that prudence and politeness demanded.

Lesley stood by his open door watching the quaint figure till it disappeared and its oak closed.

"What a rum little chap!" he said to himself.

Yet despite the rumminess, he felt a curious eagerness to renew his acquaintance with the little chap.

"And now to try and turn some pennies," he said with a sigh. "Oh Lord, how long?"

Behind the oak of Mr Hill a light was burning, and a very lonely girl was trying to keep up her spirits by smiling over her adventure. But

the smile refused to stay ; and the whole essence of the adventure seemed to be that she had made a friend for a short space and now was utterly alone again in a strange room, in a strange city, and in a very strange plight indeed.

CHAPTER XIX.

MRS MUFFET.

“ Pore young gentleman ; I do 'ope 'e's 'ad a comfertable sleep,” said Mrs Muffet to herself, as she arrived panting at the top of the stairs and opened her new charge's door. “ He don't look used ter livin' by hisself ; lived at 'ome with his ma and sisters, and bin took care of and brought up most partic'ler, and woke up by a footman in the mornin' very likely ; that's wot 'e's used ter. Well, well, we lives an' learns ; and, pore young gentleman, 'e's got to begin now.”

Having thus satisfactorily explained the antecedents of the young gentleman, and feeling prepared to give him both motherly counsel and a breakfast of boiled eggs, she knocked at the bedroom door, and then getting no answer,

entered without one. Quietly she went up to the window and pulled the blind up a little way.

"Bless 'is young 'art, 'e's sleepin' like a pretty little top," she thought, as she looked at the delicate face with the long lashes lying on the fair cheeks and the counterpane gently stirring as the sleeper breathed the deep breaths of a profound and dreamless slumber.

"'Ow odd 'e do breathe?" she said to herself; "more like a girl than a boy, I do declare!"

Yet this observation brought no trace of suspicion into her honest mind; and it was only when she came to look round the room, now filled with the diluted London daylight, that she perceived anything really remarkable. And then the first thing strange was just the lack of anything at all.

"Why, 'e 'asn't brought no luggage!" she exclaimed. "I thought as 'ow 'e was goin' to the station for to fetch it. Dearie me, wot 'as he slep' in?"

And then she observed only the outer covering of the new tenant laid upon a chair. Evidently he was sleeping in the rest of his apparel.

"God bless me! Well I never!"

These exclamations being made aloud, the sleeper moved, and then the grey eyes opened.

"Wot a picter, to be sure!" thought Mrs Muffet—though this observation she kept to herself.

"'Alf-past eight, sir. Shall I put the 'ot water on to boil now, sir?"

"Yes, please," murmured Barbara; but the kind-hearted matron still stood looking beneficently down upon her.

"Was you expectin' your luggage this mornin', sir?" she asked. "'Cos it 'asn't comed to the lodge, not when I passed; leastways Mr Jenkin—that's the 'ead porter, sir, wot brought you up 'ere—'e didn't make no mention of any luggage, which he would 'ave supposin' such to 'ave comed for any gentleman in the Inn wot 'ad ordered it, and which he knowed to be in need of 'is luggage. 'Cos 'e said to me last night: 'Mrs Muffet,' says 'e, 'that young gent o' yours'—meanin' you, sir—'e calls 'em my gents when I does their rooms,—'that young gent o' yours,' says 'e, 'asn't got no luggage yet, and I 'aven't seed 'im come out for to fetch it.' And says I, 'Per'aps, Mr Jenkin, Carter Pater-son or some of them vans is abringin' it, which ain't unlikely, so be as 'ow it's a 'eavy load and 'im not feelin' well and not choosin' to go out and fetch it hisself.' You 'aven't got nothin' for to dress with, sir. No brushes, nor sponge, nor razors,—if you uses 'em yet, beggin' your

pardon, — nor nothin'. I'll 'ave to get a loan of *somethink* for you."

During this oration Barbara had been collecting her wits and coming to a resolution. The garrulous old lady had a kind and honest face, for all her lack of aspirates; and if she could, if she dared, confide in her, she felt that the fog she wandered in would already have begun to lift, even though it were only the narrowest ray of sunshine that pierced through.

"Mrs Muffet," she said, when the flood of words had at last come to an end, "can I trust you to keep a secret?"

"Bless your 'art, sir, I've kep' 'undreds! You'd be surprised, sir, if you knowed wot I've kep'."

"But this is a very important secret—so important that if you even let any one know there is a secret, it will be as bad as telling it."

"It ain't nothin' to do with the perlice?" asked Mrs Muffet a little anxiously.

"Nothing whatever, truly; it's much worse than that."

"Worse! Dear Jimimy! And about that there luggage too?"

"It has nothing to do with the luggage."

Mrs Muffet looked relieved, for in the weekly journal she patronised she had recently read a very gruesome account of the contents of a

lady's maid's trunk, and she had not doubted that this was a parallel case.

"'As it to do with a lady?" she inquired.

"Yes it has."

"I 'ave guessed it, sir," she answered, with an air of already considering her verdict.

"You have?" cried Barbara, astounded yet a little bewildered by her tone. "What is it then?"

"You are a married man, sir."

Barbara had to hurriedly bury her face in the bed-clothes at this striking piece of intuition; and when she could compose her features she replied—

"I'm afraid, Mrs Muffet, it's worse than that even."

Mrs Muffet withdrew a step, and her gaze clearly told that the question only lay now between divorce and bigamy.

"Oh, Mrs Muffet! Can't you guess for yourself? Have you *no* idea who—what I am?"

"Bless me, sir! It ain't as bad as all that, whichever way it is! Many a young gentleman——"

"But I'm *not* a real young gentleman!"

Mrs Muffet's eyes opened to the size of saucers, and her voice trembled perceptibly as she muttered—

"It ain't ghostesses,—oh, it ain't surely!"

"Don't you see? I'm a girl!"

Had the room flown away, and Mrs Muffet found herself sitting in the Strand in her Sunday clothes, she could not have looked more astonished.

"A girl, sir—I mean miss—a young lady, sir!" she gasped.

"Look," said Barbara, sitting up suddenly, "these are not *all* men's clothes."

Well, in brief, they were not.

"God bless us!" cried the good dame. "My dearie me, and whatever are you doing 'ere, miss?"

"Listen," said Barbara eagerly, "and I'll tell you all about it,—at least all I can tell. A man wanted to marry me; I didn't love him, and he was much older than me, and he didn't treat me well; but he was very rich, and I had no parents, and everybody was forcing me into it, and so I ran away. Do you see?"

"Dear Jimimy!" ejaculated Mrs Muffet, but this time with the most intense sympathy and interest.

"I had to escape in men's clothes—it was the only possible way; and then I lost my bag with my own dress in it, and the friends I came to see had suddenly gone abroad, and I knew nowhere else to go; and so, just by chance, I took chambers here."

"I never did!" exclaimed Mrs Muffet.

"And now *remember*, you must treat me just like a man, you must even forget I'm a woman, except just when we two are alone in my rooms."

Then followed such a string of exclamations, protestations, and questions, that Barbara was in danger of getting no breakfast at all; but the time was well spent that gave her such a whole-hearted enthusiastic friend as Mrs Muffet. And one piece of information she obtained that greatly encouraged her; once she provided herself with skirt and petticoat again, Mrs Muffet assured her that there would be no difficulty about venturing through the Inn, provided she wore a good thick veil, and did not wait till evening. During the day, it seemed, so many people—women as well as men—were coming and going about the offices, that with care no suspicion should be raised. For one thing the Inn had three entrances, and, except after dark, when two of them were closed, it was unnecessary to pass the porter's lodge and the sharp eyes of Mr Jenkin. At the same time, she must live as Mr Philip Brown within the chambers, for no ladies were permitted to rent rooms.

"It will be a kind of amphibious existence," she thought; "but things are looking much better than I feared they'd ever be again."

By the time she and breakfast were both ready, it had been arranged that Mrs Muffet was to bring to her forthwith such an outfit from her youngest daughter's wardrobe as would enable her to venture out and do some shopping; and then, she thought, she could make up her mind what to do next. Her funds ought to hold out for a few weeks, living as she intended to live, and in the meantime she would have all her meals in her rooms, go out for an airing heavily veiled and decently clad, and for the rest of the time keep her door rigorously shut.

"You won't 'ave to let Mr Lesley see you goin' out in them things o' my Sally's, which he oughter know, she 'avin' done 'is rooms time my pore sister was took bad, and wore 'er best 'at and dress,—not as 'ow she should 'ave, but she did, and they're the only ones fit for you, miss, and 'e's seen 'er in 'em," said Mrs Muffet.

Barbara started, though not merely at the risk of detection in Miss Sally Muffet's best dress. The truth was that upon this morning of new hopes and plans the immediate past had slipped from her mind as a strange dream of the night. From the moment she was awakened Mrs Muffet had filled the horizon; but now, like the whistle of a train in what has seemed a desert, her words vividly brought back one very dis-

turbing factor. The whole of last evening rushed into Barbara's mind, and an extremely disconcerting element in her programme it was. Yet a smile stole into her eyes as she remarked—

“Mr Lesley very kindly gave me supper last night in his rooms.”

“My dearie! You didn't tell *'im* you was a girl?” said Mrs Muffet.

“I should think not. Didn't I tell you it was a *dead* secret? But—but— isn't he a person to tell a secret to?”

“Not that kind o' secret, my dear, 'e isn't.”

“Why not?”

“I don't say nothin' against Mr Lesley, a pleasant gentleman, and quite *the* gentleman for all he ain't very well-to-do. But young men is young men; and bein' what they are, and you bein' under 'is very nose, so to speak, it 'ud be a temptin' of Providence.”

Barbara's colour rose.

“What do you mean?” she said. “He seemed very kind.”

“What's kind to a boy may be too kind to a girl, in a manner of speakin'. Mr Lesley's a very affable gentleman, but I wouldn't give 'im no chance o' takin' advantages.”

“Isn't his character good?”

Mrs Muffet pursed her lips.

"As for character, men 'as privileges women doesn't. I don't say as Mr Lesley is *worse* nor most, but I've seen what I 'ave seen. Mrs Muffet knows most things as 'appens on this stair. You ain't been the first lady in Mr 'Ill's rooms, my dear, nor the first in Mr Lesley's either. I don't want to tell no tales, and very nice gentlemen both of 'em is, and no' different from their neighbours, and pays me my wages and treats me as I expects to be treated; and it's 'Mrs Muffet, 'ere's somethin' that may come in 'andy for you.' Very generous they is,—though if you ask me I don't think Mr Lesley 'asn't much to be generous with. But you just be Mr Brown to 'im, my dear."

During this speech Barbara's face had gradually become suffused with a most lively and becoming flush, and her eyes grown quiet and thoughtful. Yet her only reply was to ask in an indifferent tone—

"What does Mr Lesley do?"

Mrs Muffet's voice sank.

"Sometimes I see 'im a-drorin' what I won't say, and sometimes a-writin' what I can't say, and sometimes a-doin' nothin' at all but walk about 'is room like as 'e 'ad somethin' 'eavy on 'is mind, and sometimes 'e goes out and stays out, and sometimes comes in and stays in. I may 'ave suspicions all isn't as it oughter be,

though I don't say per'aps it's 'is fault; he's in trouble, though what it is I don't offer no opinion neither."

"Perhaps he is very poor," suggested Barbara.

"And that ain't likely to be very far wrong, miss, though them as 'asn't riches may be 'appier far than them as 'as, and contrarwise the other way about; and it ain't only that, *I* say, though it may be so for all I knows."

Barbara sipped her tea in silence, and then abruptly she said—

"Now, Mrs Muffet, do you mind getting me the clothes?"

Not long after this conversation Miss Barbara Cheyne, alias Mr Philip Brown, hurried by a back way from the Inn, disguised in the Sunday garments of Sally Muffet; and by the middle of the day she was again shut up in her rooms, opening sundry parcels and singing to herself cheerfully as she took out and arranged their contents. From looking at to trying on is a short step, and presently she was feeling entirely herself again in a dark jacket and skirt (and such other essentials as are essential for such a transformation).

Suddenly—rat-tat!—came a knock upon the outer door.

She stood stock-still.

"You in?" said a voice, and even through

two doors she knew it instantly as her host's of last night.

He repeated the knock and the hail, and then she could hear him returning to his own chambers.

"I wonder if he will come back some other day?" she thought. "I hope——"

She did not finish the sentence even in her mind, and what the rest of it ought to be I cannot tell.

And here we must leave her for a while to recross the Border, and see what was happening in the land she had fled from.

CHAPTER XX.

MR CLESTRAN RETURNS.

Friday and Saturday, it may be remembered, had passed over Fogo House without a sign of Mr Clestran. And now Sunday was drawing to a close and still he lingered. For poor Mrs Strynd the suspense was becoming intolerable.

"We must telegraph; we must send some one to find him; we must do something!" she cried. "The news will be all over the county before he learns it from us."

"It will save you the trouble of breaking it to him," observed Tilly.

"But what will he think of me when he hears? You are so utterly callous and indifferent; you never think of your mother's reputation! I shall be blamed, I know I shall,—though nobody deserves it less: I have been all that I could be; you can at least bear witness to *that*! And what is to become of the presents? The next thing is, some burglar will come and steal them, and then he will think *I* have made away with them! Would you *laugh*! O heartless! To think I could be the mother of such a daughter! Rose! Rose! Where is Rose? *She* at least has some filial feelings! Rose!"

Rose answered the call unwillingly enough. She considered that she had quite enough troubles of her own without serving as her mother's safety-valve. And it was not as though she got any thanks for her filial feelings.

"You ought to have foreseen it. Why didn't you warn me? It is *you* who are responsible—yes, *responsible*—for bringing this disgrace upon our house. Oh that my father's family, the rightful Earls of Lochie, should suffer this humiliation! Say something, child! Tell me, what am I to do? Ah, I see now I have no one to counsel me but my Maker,"

Apparently, however, Mrs Strynd considered this source of inspiration as a very desperate remedy, a kind of visit to the pawnbroker's, not to be tried till all reasonable measures had failed; for she continued to appeal first to one daughter and then to the other, filling the house with her lamentations all the while, till that melancholy Sabbath had come to an end.

"I shall open her letter to him!" she cried once, making a convulsive start for her writing-desk where the sealed letter to "Thomas Clestran, Esq.," was stowed. "He is never coming at all, and I *must* learn where my niece has gone."

"You will do nothing of the kind!" exclaimed Tilly, showing for the first time some symptom of excitement. "If you really wished to ruin your reputation that would be the way. Gracious, mamma, the man may be here to-morrow morning. He doesn't know there is any hurry. If you go and lie down I'll walk along the road and see if there's any sign of him."

But this stratagem was of no more avail than her more acid counsels of coolness, and night and exhaustion alone put an end to her mother's complaints.

Monday morning brought no news either of niece or Thomas Clestran, and even Tilly began to bestir herself.

"I shall go to Balnuckie and wire to Pittentrews," she said. "If he is home again that will bring him; if he isn't, I shall try to get his address and wire to him direct."

"Go!" cried her mother. "Take the carriage; tell Simpson to harness at once; don't lose a minute! Why didn't I think of this sooner?"

"Because you had too much sense, dear mamma, to make an unnecessary fuss," replied Tilly with ironical composure as she hurried from the room.

At the door she was met by Rose, with a bright eye and a flushed nervous face.

"He is coming in at the gate!" she cried.

Mrs Strynd became another person.

"Go to the morning room," she commanded her daughters. "His position will be sufficiently painful without being troubled with your excitement and curiosity. He will want to see nobody but me. Of course if he stays to lunch you will be present, but on no account must you make any allusion to what has happened. You quite understand my wishes?"

"We understand perfectly," said Tilly. "Your dear daughters are no longer necessary. It is a pity you hadn't opened that letter, though."

"Thank Heaven, I have a clear conscience," replied their mother with dignity; "*that* will

guard my reputation, and protect me even against the jibes of my own daughters!"

Having delivered this crushing blow, she hastily retired to remove the traces of her agitation, and a few minutes later entered the drawing-room with an almost majestic mien.

At the first glance it was evident that Mr Clestran had no suspicion yet of the calamity. In his courteously dignified manner he explained that business, unpleasant but necessary business, had detained him in London longer than he had intended to stay.

"As the time is now so short before my wedding, I regretted the necessity exceedingly," he said, "especially as no definite result was arrived at. And now, what news of my bride?"

There was a trace of eagerness in his smile, showing through his composure, that affected Mrs Strynd in a different way than had anything in this scandal hitherto. She even forgot the reputation of her house in her sympathy for him as she answered—

"Mr Clestran, I have most unpleasant news for you."

The "Mr Clestran" itself alarmed him, for since his engagement she had made a great point of the "Thomas."

"Without my knowledge or consent my niece

has left my house, and as yet I do not even know where she has gone."

A certain look in his eyes stopped her explanation there, and she handed him the letter, simply saying—

"She left this for you."

He took it, politely asking her permission for reading it at once, and turning his back, walked to the window as if to get a better light. Not for all Scotland would he have his face watched now. This was the letter:—

"DEAR MR CLESTRAN,—You have taught me that I can never love you, not so long as I live; and as I am quite sure you don't love me, what is the good in our pretending to get married? For it will only be a pretence where there is no love. I don't know why you ever wanted to, honestly I don't. If it was the slightest good in arguing with you I should have tried to persuade you to free me; but as I am afraid it isn't, and as every one is on your side, I am going away. Try to forgive me in time; it will take long, but I think some day you will agree it was best to part. I should never have satisfied your requirements, and you would simply have been disappointed. I am not docile enough, and I should have tried to think for myself; and it would have ended unhappily. It might have

been different if you had tried to make me love you, but you would not even let me try myself. Remember, please, that some women need a little love—but forget yours sincerely,
“BARBARA CHEYNE.”

Once he read it over, trying to comprehend its meaning. Twice he read it, and still it was a horrible enigma. A third time he tried, and then had to stop in the middle and look steadily out of the window for a little, concentrating his gaze on a tree till he saw it distinctly and unblurred. Then slowly he read on to the end.

“I should never have satisfied your requirements.” “I am not docile enough.” “It might have been different if you had tried to make me love you, but you would not even let me try myself.” What did these statements mean? Were they actually intended to express a truth? A suspicion that he would not allow to be a truth flashed upon his mind and kept haunting him by flashes, though he would not permit himself even to formulate it. It was the suspicion that for once he had been wrong, his plans misconceived, his calculations based on error.

He came to the end for the third time, and again he looked out of the window, but it was not to puzzle over meanings. Two things were

very clear to him at that moment,—he had never had her love, and now he had lost herself. And then, when he ought to have been making further inquiries and gaining fresh light, he found himself comparing this letter with her last,—the only one she had ever before written to him, and there was no criticism of that first effort now, no complaints that it contained neither the expressions of affection he had hoped for nor any reference to her pursuits. It seemed to him now so warm and loving that this one must surely be a cruel hoax. And yet there it was,—“Remember, please, that some women need a little love—but forget yours sincerely, Barbara Cheyne.”

It was Mrs Strynd's voice that roused him. What she said he was not perfectly sure, but he put the letter in his pocket and faced her with an air of quiet attention.

“Perhaps you would like to see what she wrote to me?” she suggested.

He took that brief note and carefully scrutinised it too.

“Then she has gone?” he said in a dry and measured voice.

“On Thursday night,” said Mrs Strynd.

She was more frightened by his quiet than she had expected to be by his reproaches.

"Where?"

"We none of us know."

"You have no idea?"

"None. We know nothing—unless Sir Andrew Dunsappie can tell you."

"Dunsappie!" he exclaimed. "Is he here still?"

"He left immediately after she did."

"Be kind enough to tell me exactly what you mean?"

He was roused from his stupor now, and with a righteous satisfaction in putting the blame upon the proper shoulders, Mrs Strynd told him all she knew of the strange coincidence of Barbara's disappearance and Sir Andrew's mysterious errand with her purloined dog-cart.

At the end of her account he said—

"Thank you for the information. I shall see Dunsappie at once. In the meantime say nothing to any one about what has happened. Account for Miss Cheyne's departure in some natural way, and tell people that the marriage is postponed for private reasons."

Without any further delay he bade her good-bye, and—as it seemed to her—in two gigantic strides he had left the room and reached his trap. A few seconds later he flashed past the

window, driving at headlong speed to Ochil Castle.

"Ah," she said with a sigh of satisfaction, "Sir Andrew Dunsappie will have to give an account of his conduct *now*."

And that was what Thomas Clestran was saying too. He clutched eagerly at the notion that some malign and baneful influence had been at work upon his Barbara. Somebody had poisoned her mind; somebody had stolen her love from him, and made her pretend he had never possessed it. And the baronet had been no precisian at any time in his life, and he had been left alone with her. But what was he to think of a woman so unworthy of him as to play him this trick? His heart hardened, and his anger gathered like water when a stream is dammed. When the grey towers of Ochil Castle rose before him a hard smile stole for an instant across his face. It was good, very good, to have an opponent of flesh and blood and his own sex to vent his wrath upon. In his reasonable way he had often argued with irresistible logic upon the absurdity and immorality of private revenge when the law was there to punish the guilty. A fig for the law now! He clutched his driving-whip fiercely, and wished it was a good stout hunting-crop instead.

From a window in the eight-feet-thick walls

a freckled face with red-bearded lips happened to look down the avenue.

"Damnation!" ejaculated the lips, and the face vanished like a diving duck.

CHAPTER XXI.

A MEETING THAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN FATAL.

Nothing that belonged even for a short period to Sir Andrew Dunsappie seemed capable of retaining tidiness or bloom. From his clothes to his gardens all were out-at-elbows, unkempt, and neglected; and a mansion which had for centuries been in the possession of ancestors from whom he presumably inherited his virtues could hardly look anything but forlorn. Though one of the historic seats in the county, it was not large—not more than half the size of Pittentrews; and its interest was chiefly confined to the number of years it had weathered many storms and a few skirmishes. Had it not been such a massive simple building, with its tale of years written so evidently in the plain workman-like turrets and the arrow-slit windows, it would have looked actually shabby. Wherever there was a rain-water pipe or gutter, there was a

leak ; and wherever there was a leak, a long dark smudge diversified the grey of the walls. Here and there a window was broken and papered up, here and there a chimney-can was missing ; every now and then you might observe a place where the outer harling had cracked and been patched up with fresher lime. And the surroundings were just the same : untrimmed grass by the long avenue ; unthinned, overgrown plantations ; neglected gardens with once clipped and now shabby evergreens, a few battered weather-beaten statues, and a choked-up fountain ; decay and mismanagement on every side. No wonder Mr Clestran drew morals from its owner.

But this morning he stopped for no philosophy. Throwing the reins to the groom, he reached the bell as swiftly as he had vanished from Mrs Strynd's presence, and before there was time even for an active servant to answer, its clamour had sounded repeatedly as far as the front door. And as nothing belonging to Sir Andrew made any affectation of activity, the din he caused before he was answered may be conceived. At length the front door opened, and an individual appeared who merits a word or two of description. By profession, and at one time in actual practice, he was the baronet's butler, though nowadays he received his pre-

carious wages for performing, more or less indifferently, a number of functions. In and out of the house he lent a hand with everything—when so disposed. When not disposed, work on the mansion and policies generally ceased altogether. He was in charge of the few surviving pheasants and rabbits, in charge of the two screws that occupied the long range of stables, in charge of the untended garden, and, in conjunction with the housekeeper (when there happened to be one), in charge of all the internal arrangements. In person he was thick-set and wide about the waist, with a once respectable grey eye now decidedly bloodshot, and a countenance that showed the same ensanguined tendency in several places. In fact, it was commonly reported that the ravages on the Ochil cellars were by no means confined to his master's depredations. To complete this sketch, it need only be added that in defiance of all buttling conventions he answered to the name of "Dougie."

By the time he appeared Mr Clestran's patience had almost reached the end of its tether.

"I wish to see Sir Andrew," he said shortly, with a movement as though he would enter forthwith.

Dougie came a step out to meet him, half closing the door behind him, and still hitching

himself into the rusty black tail-coat that alone gave a clue to his calling, for the rest of him was clad in an old suit of Sir Andrew's of a light and sportive check.

"He's no' in," he replied with brevity but perfect friendliness.

"He is in," said Mr Clestran. "I saw him at the window."

His keen eye had in fact caught a glimpse of the quickly vanishing face, though at the distance he could only guess whose it might be. But in Dougie's eye he saw the guess confirmed.

"That's remarkable!" said Dougie. "Are ye sure, sir?"

"Perfectly."

"Sir Andra at the windy? He's nae business to be there. Which windy was it?"

"Which window? What does that matter? I say he is in, and I wish to see him."

"I doubt ye'll no' be able,—no' to-day, that's to say."

"Do you mean to pretend he is out?"

"I make nae pretences, Maister Clestran; Sir Andra's no' fit to see company, and that's the truth of it."

"What is the matter with him?"

"Well, ye see, sir, it's this way. Last Thursday night Sir Andra cam' hame wi' a cauld and his temperature a wee bit risen, and

a'together no' fit to gang about. But for all I could say he wad be out the next day. That was Friday, ye understand, and a cauld kind of day it was and no' weather for an invalid to be out in. And sae the nateral consequences followed; on Friday efternoon——"

"Where is he now?" thundered Mr Clestran.

"I'm telling ye, sir. On Friday efternoon—— Gude Heevens! ye mustna' gang in! The doctor——"

"Damn the doctor!" said Mr Clestran, pushing past him and flinging the door open.

"My certie! he's awfu' angered," muttered the disconcerted butler. "But I mustna let him see Sir Andra till he's got intil his bed."

In fact it had been arranged at a hasty council of war that in case the unwelcome visitor insisted on testing the truth of Dougie's first statement, his master should provide a second string to his bow by taking literally to bed. It was Dougie's own inspiration, and he now highly plumed himself on his sagacity. But the more delay the better.

"Whisht, sir! whisht!" he cried in a loud hoarse whisper, rather like a gasping raven. "Ye are not to make mair noise than ye can help. If ye'd just bide a minute till I take off your boots for ye, sir!"

But once inside the Castle Mr Clestran never

deigned even to answer these piteous appeals. With a firm swift stride he went through the shabby hall and the bare passages and up the unwashed stairs, straight for the baronet's bedroom, the agitated Dougie close upon his heels.

"Wait a wee minute outside till I tell him you're here," he implored. "He's mebbe asleep!"

Instead, Mr Clestran turned and said in a low stern voice that fairly frightened him away—

"I wish to see Sir Andrew on private business. Go downstairs and wait there till you're called!"

As he paused to see this order carried out, the discomfited retainer saw nothing for it but beating a retreat, for the moment at least. Then, after a single sharp knock, he entered. The room was in semi-darkness, and Dunsappie was undoubtedly in bed, though from the extreme confusion it looked suspiciously as though his undressing had only very recently been performed.

"Dunsappie!"

"Hullo, Clestran, you here? The very man I wanted to see! Pull up the blind, won't you?"

Mr Clestran pulled up the blind and fixed his eyes upon his quondam friend. Beneath their bushy brows they seemed, as the invalid after-

wards used to say, to burn like two lamps behind smoked glass.

"I presume you know why I have come?"

"My dear chap, of course; Mrs Strynd sent you, I suppose."

"She did."

"I say, I'm awfully sorry about it all, Clestran."

"I wish to have your explanation. Where is Miss Cheyne?"

"I only wish I knew; I'd tell you like a shot if I did. I left her at the station, honour bright. Don't know anything more about it."

"Then you admit you took her away?"

"What! haven't you heard how it happened?" asked Dunsappie, for it had not occurred to him that nobody but himself knew any details of the escapade. He had supposed that by now the full story had reached Fogo House.

"I have not, and I shall be obliged if you will tell me, that I may know whether you deserve horsewhipping as a scoundrel!"

"What the devil!" cried Dunsappie. "What d'ye mean, Clestran? I'm hanged if any one is going to talk to me like that! If I wasn't in bed——"

"Where you went to escape me," interrupted his visitor. "I haven't come to hear you bluster: tell me the truth."

“ I’m hanged if I’ll do it for your threats. If you asked me civilly now——”

Clestran rapidly strode across the room and back again.

“ Tell me,” he said.

There was a note almost of agony in his voice, and his words were as much an appeal as a command. “ Poor devil!” thought the good-natured baronet; and volubly and candidly he told him the whole story of how Barbara had employed him to drive the young man to the station.

“ And if it hadn’t been for missing my clothes, by Gad I’d never have suspected who the young fellow was. It was devilish well done, Clestran, I must say!” he exclaimed at the end of it.

Mr Clestran, as has been said before, was essentially a just man, hard though his justice might sometimes be, and he felt that this narrative was no mere invention. Yet it swept away the crumb of comfort that lay in the thought she had been herself deceived, and that he might at least punish the deceiver; and his feelings had to find some vent.

“ Then I understand that you, whom I left in charge of—of her, got drunk, and let her deceive you by a stratagem any child could have seen through!” he exclaimed bitterly.

“ Drunk!” protested Dunsappie. “ I had only

two—or three, or—well, four at the most small ones. I don't call myself *drunk* inside of a dozen, and not always then. Hang it, if there's one thing I do know, it is what's drunk and what's only kind of tiddly; and on my word of honour as a Dunsappie, Clestran, I remember perfectly everything that happened! I don't do that when I'm drunk, I assure you. No, by Gad, I——”

“Do you mean to say you had no suspicions of her intentions beforehand?” interrupted Clestran; “even when you happened to be quite sober?”

But these unjustifiable aspersions on his conduct at a time when he was keeping painfully, almost morbidly, steady, were more than Sir Andrew could stand.

“I did have suspicions,” he retorted, “not that she was going to bolt, but that you were treating her devilish foolishly. Do you think a girl is a kind of machine, like your cistern and cigar-box and all the rest of it? She'd have to be a deuced docile woman to stand it: the girl was just wanting a little love—and you were giving her lessons! I saw that fine.”

Mr Clestran stared at him in silence. Never before had Dunsappie stood up to him like this; but it was not only that which staggered him, it was the repetition of those words—“docile,”

"wanting a little love." It seemed almost as though Sir Andrew had read her letter.

"Did she say these things to you?" he asked.

"She never said a word against you, Clestran; but, hang it, I've eyes in my head."

Again there was silence for a minute or two, and then in a hard stifled voice Clestran said—

"Can I trust you to say nothing of this to any one?"

"My dear fellow, of course you can!"

"Thank you. Good-bye."

"I say, you're not going yet, Clestran, old man?" cried the amiable baronet. "I'm sorry I spoke so——"

But already his visitor had departed, and with a mind so burdened that he altogether failed to notice a stout figure scurry into an open door till he had passed.

"He can let himself out the same as he let himself in," said this nearly convicted spy to himself. "I'm no' gaun down to open the door for a daft whirlwind like him."

So instead of doing his duty by the departing guest, Dougie repaired to his master's room to indulge their mutual love of gossip—for stiffness with his servants (male or female) was not one of Dunsappie's foibles.

"An awfu' tantrum Pittentrews has got intil," said the butler.

"My God, Dougie!" exclaimed his master, "that was a deuce of a shave! If I hadn't been in bed, I believe the man would have assaulted me without listening to a word I had to say."

"It was a fine notion that," said Dougie complacently.

"But mind you," Dunsappie went on, "Mr Clestran has some excuse, you know. He's devilish worried."

"Nae wonder, being jilted like yon."

"You rascal, you've been listening at the door!" exclaimed Dunsappie.

"Listening! Wha could help hearing?" said Dougie unblushingly. "I dared na be far off for fear he should offer ye violence, Sir Andra."

This explanation his master accepted the more readily as it enabled him to discuss matters freely.

"Whatever you heard, you must hold your tongue, you know. Not a word of this is to get about, mind you, Dougie."

"Oh ay, sir, I'll mind. Ye needna fear."

Having given this pledge, he felt at liberty to pursue the main subject.

"Awful like conduct of the young lady," he remarked. "To think of her wearing your breeks, sir!"

"She looked deuced well in 'em," said Sir Andrew with a chuckle.

"It's to be hoped ither men will be as blind as you, sir."

"Blind! What the devil do you mean?"

"Oh, I didna mean blind fou', Sir Andra; just no' observing, that's a'. It would be a bad job if any ane took advantage of her."

"It would that," Dunsappie agreed; "but we'll hope for the best. She's a fine girl, Dougie; and between ourselves, you understand, Mr Clestran doesn't know much about dealing with women."

"He's a' theory," said Dougie; "and it's no theory one wants wi' the women, it's practice. This will learn him a lesson, though."

"It's to be hoped so, Dougie; but I doubt he's too old to learn lessons now, and, between ourselves, a wee bit too obstinate."

"Ay," said Dougie complacently, "I've often pitied him: him and his theories was sure to get a cowp some day."

"By Gad!" exclaimed Dunsappie, as a new aspect of the case came home to him, "he'll not be able to lecture me on my want of system for some time to come, thank the Lord!"

"'It's an ill wind blaws naebody gude,'" said his butler philosophically.

And with this wise aphorism we may leave these critics.

CHAPTER XXII.

ANOTHER LETTER.

Sitting as upright as ever in his trap, his face as stern and as composed, Mr Clestran drove home. Till he had passed beneath the arch of limes and seen his house rise close before him, his mind had been filled with nothing but the writhings and gnashings of wounded pride,—the pride of the proudest of men laid in the dust in full view of the scornful and the exulting. But in the presence of his home, now doomed to remain unshared, there came upon him suddenly and overwhelmingly the significance of his loss. No Barbara! no grey-eyed girl he loved! For in that moment he learned how dearly he had loved her. He bent his head, and, hurrying past his servants, sought shelter with the instinct of a bleeding animal.

The next day he had to attend a meeting in the county town. Stoically he faced the ordeal, and not one of his neighbours and friends ventured to put a question concerning the strange rumours that already were going the round of the countryside—for never had he looked more formidably quiet. During the

next few weeks he saw as few people as he could, shirking no duty and scorning to run away and seek refuge from the curious or distraction for himself, but speaking to no man if he could avoid it, and living solitary and secluded. As for pursuing and recapturing his lost bride, nothing was further from his thoughts. His energies seemed numbed by the blow, and to keep silent and out of sight his only object. In that big house, where once had been a son, and a wife so nearly had come, he merely nursed his broken pride and tried not to feel his loneliness.

There was, however, one lady who, as the days went by, became both bewildered and indignant at this course of conduct. Mrs Strynd had expected his early return with news of his encounter with Sir Andrew Dunsappie and some words of consolation for herself. On her part she had prepared several such words for him; and after these had been exchanged, the recapture of her niece would doubtless be accomplished. Then perhaps if Barbara's sin had not been so grievous as her sorrow-stricken aunt still feared, and if she showed a proper spirit of penitence, the reputation of her house might still be saved by a belated marriage. Or, at the worst, she would at least have the satisfaction of inflicting a suitable punishment.

"What do you propose to do to her?" asked Tilly, apropos of the question of penalty.

"I shall first make her sensible of her sin," replied her mother, in a manner so impressive as to make the very vagueness of this threat enhance its terrors.

"She's a little fool, of course, but you can't whip her," said Tilly; "and as I've always said, it served Thomas Clestran right for treating her as he did. I shouldn't trouble my head about her: if she learns sense she will come back, and if she doesn't, who wants her?"

But, as frequently happened, what seemed plain wisdom to Tilly appeared to her mother only a fresh attempt to insult her understanding and deride her sentiments.

"Never should I so far forget my duty!" she exclaimed; "my religion and my conscience forbid me. But why should I speak of what you cannot understand? My father's family, the rightful Earls of Lochie, would turn in their graves if they could hear your impious suggestions. Where is Rose? She at least is my daughter."

As usual, this outburst was followed by an equally severe denunciation of Rose, and then by an instinctive return to her elder daughter's support. The poor lady was indeed in a difficult position. It was all very well for Mr Clestran

to bid her account for her niece's departure "in some natural way," but what way could conceivably appear natural? It was his duty, she considered, to explain the matter, and certainly his bounden duty to take steps for the recovery of the fugitive bride.

"He is certain to be taking them," said Tilly. "Don't worry, mother. In a couple of days you'll see Thomas Clestran bringing her home at the end of a patent leash."

That was the one crumb of consolation left to Mrs Strynd,—the hope that he was only waiting till he could bring her news. So much was she afraid of him that she dared do nothing of herself without first consulting him; and each day she waited for his coming, and renewed the same complaints. And so the time passed without hue and cry being raised.

But if Mrs Strynd was to be pitied, what shall be said of poor Rose? Her pretty little doll's face was growing visibly thinner, though her mother's mind was too distraught to see it; her blue eyes had a look, sometimes sad, sometimes frightened; and her conscience and her heart used to wonder which of them was the more troubled. The scheme that seemed so promising had gone utterly agley. Instead of seeking consolation from the friend who could really sympathise, *he* had never so much as come near her. And there was worse than that. One day,

when she was walking, she happened to meet him driving swiftly towards her. He glanced at her face for an instant—she looked right into the bright stern eyes—and then swept by without so much as recognising her. She made no mention at home of having seen him, but from that day all hope of success deserted her, and, for want of hopes, her mind fed all the more upon fears. What if her crime were discovered? For nothing less than a crime would her mother deem her share in the family disgrace. The whole vengeance would fall upon her—not a friend to take her part; she was perfectly certain of that.

At last one morning the next thing to the worst happened. A letter came for her with the London post-mark, and addressed in an unfamiliar and evidently an uneducated hand. Strange though the writing was, and wide as is London, she felt a presentiment of danger before she opened the envelope, and first took it furtively to her room. There, to be sure, was a letter inside, in Barbara's handwriting. It was headed "6 Our Lady's Inn, Strand, London," and it ran thus:—

"DEAREST ROSE,—I hope you will get this without any suspicion being aroused. I am getting my laundress to address it for safety's sake. I can't stop to tell you all the remarkable

things that have happened to me, and I don't know whether you would be more amused or shocked if I did. Shocked, I'm afraid! Please send me the other £10 that belongs to me. I'm frightfully sorry to trouble you, and I wouldn't ask you, Rose dear, if I could possibly help it. But I *must* have the money—and *at once*. If it is necessary you can even tell Aunt Jane, and say that this is the last of me, and that I'll never ask her for anything again. If you would rather I wrote to her myself, send me a wire at once. But anyhow the money must be sent *quickly*. Forgive me for bothering you. Very much love. In great haste, your affectionate cousin,

BARBARA."

Rose's first thought was to burn the letter and take no notice of the request; her second, that this would probably mean a letter to her mother repeating the demand; and then, how could she trust Barbara not to let slip in some way her share in the escape?

"She would probably give me away out of spite," she reflected.

Rose, it may be remembered, prided herself on judging woman's motives. She was one herself, and so, she presumably argued, ought to know. The longer she thought it over the more despairingly convinced she became that

there was nothing for it but satisfying the demands of her rapacious and heartless cousin. Now that her object in helping her had vanished, it seemed mere black-mail to ask for further assistance; she even began to persuade herself that she had been trapped into the plot at the beginning, and to mourn for herself as the victim of a horrid conspiracy: but all these reflections only served to augment her fears of what might happen if she failed to send the money. For she knew Barbara's wilfulness, and was sure that if she wanted a thing very badly it was not through want of trying that she would fail to get it.

But where was Rose to get the sum of ten pounds? Certainly not out of her own pocket, and as certainly not out of her mother's or Tilly's. She thought for an instant of her friends the Misses Gilliewie of Riggs; but they came of prolific parentage, and the whole eight of them had to rest content with fifteen pounds of pin-money each. Then the thought came to her of Mrs Kirkaldy, the baker's wife in Balnuckie. Rose was an old favourite of hers, and the Kirkaldys did a thriving business. At a pinch she might lend her such a sum. In any case it seemed her best chance, so she took her bicycle and rode off to the little town.

That night she went to bed with her fears very little allayed, and her conscience pricking her afresh as she thought of the straits she knew the good Mrs Kirkaldy was put to; but the ten pounds were already on their way to Our Lady's Inn.

CHAPTER XXIII.

IN NUMBER SIX.

Like a fresh fall of snow the silence of Sunday lay over London, hushing the clatter, sweetening the air, changing, if but a little, the tenor of men's thoughts. In the quadrangle of the old Inn, more than in most places, this hush lay deep, almost as though it had drifted there and was piled in wreaths. A great flock of pigeons stalked about the gravel with bobbing heads and tails, and then suddenly on an impulse they would rise with a quick clatter and a soft beating of wings and settle in long lines about the roofs. Upon the trees in the garden little green shoots were imperceptibly growing; but they and the pigeons were the only living things to be seen. Sunshine on old brick walls and a blue sky overhead made the rest of the picture that

Barbara gazed at so thoughtfully from her open window.

"Who would believe this 'was in the middle of London?" she said to herself, smiling more happily than she had smiled for days.

This was the second Sunday she had spent in the Inn, and the ninth day of her tenancy. Nothing had gone wrong; she had remained safe and undiscovered as Mr Philip Brown, and she had settled down into a possible and endurable way of life under these strange conditions. But a restlessness was steadily growing upon her. What between the fear of discovery by the porters of the Inn and the terror of again meeting Mr Clestran, she had gone out but little, and the monotonous aimlessness of her existence shut up within those panelled walls was becoming more and more irksome. Mr Hill's bookcase kept her well supplied with reading, and that was not only a great resource, but it also awoke her dormant interest and taste. Her drawing, too, which she used to consider her one talent, she exercised often, and made many an hour pass swiftly in sketches from her window or memory portraits. And then she did a deal of thinking. It seemed to her she had never thought so much before in her life, or been visited by so many strange and perplexing notions. Already indeed she was be-

ginning to be a different girl from the Barbara who so light-heartedly snapped her engagement ties and escaped in stolen raiment. She was making acquaintance with herself, and so far solitude was a boon; but it was a boon dearly purchased by its unutterable loneliness and the frequent deep depressions of her spirit. And thinking sometimes meant mere worrying. What next? Where to find a friend? How to earn her living? When could she venture to leave this refuge and be herself again? These questions kept her awake more than one night: especially, how to earn a living? Even this soothing prospect from the window could not quite drive it away, and it was that which gave her face its thoughtfulness. As for friends, she had made the very utmost of Mrs Muffet, and got both consolation and entertainment from that kind-hearted old lady's conversation. Yet at most, an hour or two a-day was all she could spare from her numerous other duties, and that went no great distance.

But what of her next-door neighbour, the obliging Mr Lesley? the exceptionally curious reader may inquire. Well, it is possible that same question accounted for the smile which occasionally overcame the thoughtfulness. She had seen him once or twice in the course of the last week, though only when he had come to

her rooms; for she had resolved that the line must be drawn at going to his. She had, further, been studiously reserved, and never encouraged him to linger; whereupon he, seeing that this youth was of a moody and unaccountable turn, had relaxed his interest and let her alone. Yet he could not help feeling curiosity and a certain odd fascination; and last night he had told her that he should come in this morning.

“Even if his character is bad,” she thought, “half an hour of his company cannot possibly hurt me. I must see somebody sometimes!”

The feeling that her loneliness was going to be broken for a little kept the smile frequently returning as she watched the pigeons and mused on all manner of things. Her shamefacedness at meeting a man had been greatly mitigated by the purchase of a dressing-gown, and with this wrapped round her, concealing her tweed suit entirely, she looked forward to the meeting with a pleasant feeling of excitement.

At last he came, dressed more presentably than usual, and as polite as ever. In the beginning their talk was friendly and unstrained, almost like any two young men, and yet not quite. It was a sense of the not-quitiness that soon made him fall silent and glance at her

curiously through the cloud of his tobacco smoke ; and it was this falling silent and these glances that quickly embarrassed her too.

"Does he suspect something?" she wondered, with a mixture of definite alarm and vague discomfort.

"What do you do with yourself all day?" he asked abruptly.

"I thought no questions were to be asked."

"I beg your pardon, no more they were."

"Still I don't mind telling you," she said, "that I haven't been doing anything."

"And I don't mind admitting that I've been working hard."

"Really?" she said with a smile, and a little lift of the eyebrows intended to encourage further confidences.

Lesley smiled back with pure delight in the charm of this strange young man.

"Yes," he said ; and then suddenly added, as if impelled to give the confidence required, "I am writing a book."

"A story?" asked Barbara, getting vastly interested now.

"A kind of fairy tale."

"Isn't that rather difficult to write?"

"To write well—yes," he said. "But mine is an easier variety. It has a moral which nobody will see, a plot which nobody will follow, and

is illuminated by a humour which nobody will understand."

"How do you know they won't?"

"*I* think because they are fools; *they* will say because I'm one."

"But can't you make it clearer?"

"That would mean an operation on their heads."

"Or on yours," suggested Barbara. She said this with such a smile, that though it savoured of "cheek" in this very young man, he took no offence at all, rather wondering the while why he did not.

"The fact is," he said, "it needs illustrations to explain its virtues. I have tried three publishers, and none of them will take it as it is."

"Why don't you get illustrations, then?"

"From whom? I know none of these kind of fellows who draw pictures. Perhaps if I were to hang about the bars in the Strand long enough I might make their acquaintance; but I have neither the time, the money, nor the constitution."

"Is that where artists are found?" she exclaimed.

He twisted his little moustache and laughed.

"I imagine so; but really I don't know much about 'em."

"I thought they had studios."

"Not the kind of person who would be willing to illustrate my masterpieces: he must be collected with a brush and shovel."

"Do you mean that you have a low opinion of your work, or a low opinion of artists?"

"I confess I have a poor opinion of the few Bohemians I have met masquerading as artists. As to my work, I endeavour to think of it with a becoming modesty."

"I want," said Barbara, "to know what you *really* think?"

"I really think," answered Lesley, "much what I have said. On the lower rungs of the artistic ladders, whether they be painting ladders, or writing ladders, or musical ladders, you get a crowd of people whose only qualification is their disinclination for honest work. Among them are a few with some genuine original talent slowly forcing their way upwards. Do you see?"

"Which class do you belong to?"

"Honestly I cannot tell you."

"Why did you become an artist?" pursued Barbara, who, when she was interested, never willingly relinquished her quests.

"I was born with the disinclination, I thought I had the talent, and circumstances did the rest."

"I hope you will succeed," she said.

Though her voice was carefully restrained her glance corroborated the wish, and he felt a thrill of gratitude that astonished his cooler judgment.

"What the deuce does it matter to you?" he asked abruptly, but with a friendly half-embarassed laugh that contradicted the question.

The colour rose in her face like a tidal wave.

"I am sorry," she stammered. "I didn't mean——"

He sprang from his seat and went to the fire ostensibly to knock the ashes out of his pipe, but as he passed her he let his hand lie on her shoulder for a moment.

"It matters to me," he said; "I am short of friends."

He turned and bent over the fire with his back to her, tapping with his pipe as he went on in a voice that still showed an undercurrent of feeling.

"I am neither quite one thing nor quite the other, don't you know; and I neither want the patronage of old acquaintances as a poor gentleman nor of new ones as a poor author. So your coming here has been a slice of luck for me,—or rather, that's as you like to make it. I dislike sentiment as much as you do, so let us call it heads or tails; heads for friends, tails t'other thing, and assume I've tossed. Which has it fallen?"

As he asked, he turned and faced her with a

smile that brought up a fresh wave of colour. While he spoke, Barbara had been experiencing the most extraordinary tumult of sensations. The position was so false, so ridiculous, so unheard-of, so impossible, and yet so unaccountably far from unpleasant. Whether to laugh, cry, blush, chide, encourage, or what to do, she had not the remotest conception.

"Which do you want?" she asked.

"Heads it is," he replied decisively, striding back to his chair.

Barbara was divided between scorn of herself for her weak-minded answer, and relief that he had decided, not she.

"*I* haven't consented," she consoled herself by thinking, "and it takes two to make friends." Yet she said no word of this proviso aloud.

Lesley was also thinking. For a long time past he had shunned company, kept his own counsel, and lived his life alone. The fascination, the magic that had drawn him out now must be singularly strong. "It is the gift of sympathy; that is his charm. I have never felt it so strongly in a man before," he said to himself. He had solved, he thought, the mystery of Philip Brown's attraction, but the solution drew him the more strongly to his new friend.

"How do you like these rooms?" he asked after a pause.

"Very much," she said; and with this as a beginning, she found herself talking more freely than ever, and the proviso receding further and further into the backward recesses of her mind, till at length she began to ask herself why she should not take advantage of this chance for getting counsel on her own difficulty. After all, it committed her to nothing.

"I told you I had been doing nothing," she said at last. "But I should like to do something if I could."

"What?" he inquired.

"I don't know; that's the difficulty."

He looked at her up and down, and this time she did not object nearly so much to his gaze.

"What can you do?" he asked.

"Nothing well, I'm afraid. I—I can draw a little; but then you don't encourage artists."

"Not bad ones," he laughed. "Have you got any of your sketches here?"

With a fresh blush and a little half-hearted demur, she brought them out for him. He looked them over critically and slowly.

"They are damned good," he said, with cordial conviction.

Barbara ought to have felt more startled than she did, but the praise condoned the profanity.

"Do you really like them?"

"I wouldn't say so if I didn't." He still

looked at them thoughtfully, and then as if he had come to a decision, he exclaimed—

“I say, Brown, would you care to illustrate my book? I’ve been trying myself, but I lack the skill to express my ideas. Will you do it?”

Again a very becoming blush arose in Mr Philip Brown’s cheeks, and a series of swiftly changing expressions in his eyes. He began with a diffident “I couldn’t,” and at last ended with “I’ll try.” Lesley went straightway and brought in his own rough sketches, and as the church bells began to clang from a dozen steeples, near and far, they sat down to discuss the business.

“Of course,” he said, “we shall share the profits; that’s understood.”

Nothing had been further from her thoughts than such an enterprise in such company; but once she had begun she was carried along by the impetuosity and energy of her new ally as she had so lately been carried towards matrimony by the determination of Mr Clestran. Only this time she swam with the current more willingly at every stroke.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A WORK OF ART.

On behalf of Miss Barbara Cheyne, I am bound to say that she showed as much dignity and discretion throughout these strange relations with her neighbour in Our Lady's Inn as she had shown unconventionality in beginning them. Very seldom, indeed, and then only for some strong reason, did she ever enter his rooms again. While he was in hers she never forgot that it was only under false pretences; and though she had made the pretences herself, she was most careful to let nothing be either said or done that the revealed Barbara would not, or should not, have permitted. Being quick in the uptake, and readily adaptable by nature, she soon caught a certain tone of sensible good-comradeship that fitted with his air to her. A very little sharp experience taught her that neither feminine whims nor feminine aloofness passed current when displayed by Mr Philip Brown. Either they were laughed at or contemptuously disregarded. And—though she was scarcely aware of it

herself—a desire to obtain her friend's good opinion grew stronger every day.

All the time she kept finding him better company. At first his frankness and friendliness seemed to stop at a certain point,—at the point, in fact, where it had begun. But as the days passed, and they forgot themselves in the interest of the work they were doing, revelations and confidences dropped, as it were, accidentally one after another. She was such a good listener,—that was how he put it to himself when he stopped to inquire why he should display his heart on his sleeve so frequently to this young and inexperienced companion. On her part, she was more than ever perplexed and interested by the deep cleavage between the two sides of him. One half was the “agreeable marquis half,” as she still called it to herself. He talked with a fine unaffected humorous superiority of his fellow Bohemians, so far as he knew them. To such an extent did he apparently carry this, that not more than once or twice did he ever bring them to his rooms, and never presented them to her. It was not that he was what is generally known as snobbish—merely that he possessed, as he put it once himself, “gentle prejudices.”

The other, and by far the more interesting half, was radical and unorthodox to the point

sometimes of bitterness. The word "restraint" seemed to act on him like "rats!" to a terrier.

"Whose soul have I got?" he asked, twisting his toy moustache nearly out by the roots. "My own or somebody else's? If it belongs to anybody else, they can trim it and distort it to suit themselves; but if it belongs to me, I'll do with it just precisely what I like."

"Do you want me to decide who it belongs to?" asked Barbara, with a smile in her eyes that instantly brought out another side of him. For his aspects changed with bewildering abruptness.

"I want you to avoid my example, and marry a sensible widow with a little money," he replied.

In this way he would turn the current of his talk hither and yonder, from one vein suddenly to the opposite, like a man recklessly swinging about a watering-can, she once thought. Yet he always interested her. Deep down in his heart, she thought, he knew what was right and what was wrong, however stoutly he might deny the existence of boundaries, and was always aware when he talked for talking's sake. This meant that she was already his advocate against his own aspersions on his character, and for evidence she had just her heart and a few glimpses of different moods,—moods when he was silent, and seemed possessed either

by a better angel or a darker devil. A better angel, she considered, though Mrs Muffet hinted at the other alternative.

That good lady, besides being perturbed at her protégé's growing intimacy with Lesley, was in the habit of attaching the darkest explanations to anything she failed to understand;—a not uncommon habit of some otherwise blameless people. When she observed "her Mr Lesley" in a silent fit, her baffled curiosity suggested the direst issues. She herself, when she had pleasant and creditable thoughts, never dreamt of suppressing them; and so, one supposes, she argued that his thoughts must be unpleasant and discreditable.

"Just you be careful, my dear," she said to Barbara ominously. "I seed 'im a-thinkin' to 'isself last night wot wouldn't do to be repeated aloud."

"How do you know what he was thinking?" asked Barbara, between annoyance and amusement.

"If you 'ad knowed wot I've knowed,—not 'avin' wished to know it either, but my eyes bein' opened in a way of speakin',—you'd know wot it is better you shouldn't know, miss."

This suggested very dark and dangerous things, and might indeed cover the whole field of sin and crime; but its only effect was to put

Mr Lesley's advocate upon her mettle, and set her to imagining more charitable explanations for a young man's reticence to a garrulous old servant.

"I don't believe a word of what she says about him," she thought.

At this stage of their acquaintance she could not permit herself to regard him as a bad character and yet retain her own self-respect, for insensibly and unavoidably the strict rules she had laid down were daily becoming relaxed. She could not, for instance, always keep preventing him from resting a hand upon her shoulder as he overlooked her drawing; and each time he did it the more natural did the action become to both of them, and the more absurd would a protest from Mr Philip Brown have seemed. Also, in her most secret heart, she was proud of having won the confidence and friendship of this clever young man, so fastidious in his choice of acquaintances and so candid in his dislikes; and as she saw that confidence sensibly diminish each time she placed herself "on guard," it began to follow that she threw herself into that attitude more seldom. And, as a further consequence, confidence on his part begot an increasing loyalty on hers. Towards people like her aunt, whom she did not quite trust, she remained constantly

distant and suspicious ; but when she did give her friendship, she gave it generously. So that, on all accounts, she decided, Mrs Muffet must be talking nonsense.

Meanwhile Lesley was finding a singular relish and consolation in this friendship. Of a strong artistic and sympathetic nature, unlucky in his career hitherto, poor, proud, and isolated from his fellows, he suddenly found this mysterious attractive boy tumbled into his existence as if shot out of the skies. What the bond was that seemed so swiftly to unite them he never could satisfactorily explain. "Sympathy"—the word he had first used to describe it—became on longer acquaintance insufficient. There was another charm as well, a fascination that made him, usually undemonstrative towards his own sex, desire to express, not only in his voice and manner, but by touch, by a caressing hand, how friendly he felt. At first he laughed at himself, and then he came to accept this mood as a matter of course.

So far as their work went, things were progressing more successfully than either of them had honestly expected. At first the illustrating was to be an experiment ; but now it had fairly passed beyond that stage, and Barbara was well under way with her work. She found that the story was, as Lesley had said, a "kind" of fairy

tale indeed, but certainly by no means the usual species. It was a hybrid, in fact, a whimsical elaboration of the old rhyme, "Who killed Cock Robin?" served up with a mixture of gaiety and venom that both entertained and a little offended her.

"I don't understand exactly what all of it means," she said. "Cock Robin himself, I suppose, is intended for an unappreciated author."

"For me, you think?" he inquired.

"Isn't he?" she asked.

"Hang it, no! Cock Robin is the spirit of Freedom slain by the bow and arrow of Respectability,—pierced by a text, buried in a sepulchre of regulations."

He looked at her half quizzically, and she did not feel perfectly sure how far he was in earnest. Under these circumstances she generally found that a little unfairness induced him to explain himself.

"You mean that you are attacking people who don't sympathise with you, and making yourself into an allegory?"

"Making myself into an allegory?" he exclaimed. "I'd as soon think of making myself into a wheel-barrow! Don't you know an IDEA when you meet it?"

"I know a sensible one—*when* I meet it," she

retorted, and, a little displeased with his tone, went on reading the manuscript.

He looked at her, puzzled and amused. Philip Brown certainly combined some odd qualities.

To do him justice, however much he had been under the influence of an idea while he wrote this tale, he regarded it now with a critical unenthusiastic eye, and made no boasting about its merits. They might make a few honest pennies by it, he said; and then it came out in the course of their conversation that he had some grounds for hope, as he had already published a somewhat similar book and made a little by it. "A few pounds," he said. "But my publisher made something, and he is willing to turn this out for me if I can get some humorous pictures for it. Then people may mistake it for a mere joke and recommend it to their friends."

"When really it is a profound idea?" asked Barbara, a little maliciously.

It was one of the things that interested her in him, that sometimes he retaliated in kind upon these speeches of hers, and sometimes retorted with a vigorous defence.

"It is my one idea—the idea I *know* to be true. And the idea is this, that men are ruled by sentiments, by emotions—such as pride,

honour, religion, love—and they obey those cheerfully to the end if you touch them, if you rouse them, if you give them scope! But if you press a lot of leaden weights called reasonable-conduct, and letter-of-the-law, and eye-for-an-eye, and tooth-for-a-tooth hard down on top of them, then you either get the unlovely monsters who killed Cock Robin—or you get me.”

She made no reply, and presently went on with her drawing; but her thoughts were busy. Extreme and violent as this turbulent idea inevitably sounded to a young girl, it fitted her own case singularly. Mr Clestran and his system—what were they but the leaden weights? And what did her presence here mean if not the extremest protest a man or a woman could make? And then, as her thoughts withdrew from her own case they turned with more interest than ever to her companion. She had often amused herself by trying to invent past histories for him, and this glimpse provided her with fresh material. Already she had gleaned that—as she had guessed the first night they met—he had once looked on better days and sat at good men’s feasts. Carefully as he always avoided references to his past, he had admitted a residence at Oxford (though denying a degree); the two engravings dated from those days, he said; and he had attributed the candlesticks vaguely

to a legacy. Furthermore, occasional oblique remarks indicated that his "gentle prejudices" arose from indubitably gentle surroundings; and, inexperienced though she was, she shrewdly concluded that his indifferent tone whenever he referred to society proved that he had moved freely in it. She thought over all these things not merely once or twice; indeed she had at last to supply herself with sensible commonplace grounds for thinking so often. She liked to get at the bottom of things, and there were few other things to think about,—and no other people, and it was better than thinking about herself,—and, in short, she kept on thinking.

CHAPTER XXV.

LESLEY HAS COMPANY.

Small as was the little world within the gates of the old Inn, and secluded as Barbara's life in it continued to be, she now began to find a wonderful deal of entertainment in watching and hearing of it. From her window she saw the same people day after day: the junior porters with green coats and metal badges, who relieved each other morning and afternoon of the duties

of gossiping with their acquaintances and feeding the pigeons; the lawyers who hurried across the quadrangle with their black bags in the morning, went out to lunch with their hands in their pockets, and at night hurried off to the suburbs with their black bags again; the office boys who clattered whistling down the stairs and posted letters in the pillar box by the garden railings; the residents who went out in the morning and came home at night;—all these she came to know by headmark, and sometimes was supplied with fragments of their history by Mrs Muffet.

“That there gentleman with the spectakles and the mustarsh?” she would say. “That’s Mr Green in Number 2, wot I does for like as I does for you. Somethin’ in the British Museum ’e is. Mannyscrits, that’s wot ’e does there, but ’ow exac’ly and wot ’e does with ’em I never could understand. Wot is mannyscrits? Writin’s of some sort to be sure, though why they ain’t called books or papers or maggyzins but just mannyscrits, I don’t know either. ’As a sister at ’Ampstead married to a Mr ’Arris or ’Arrison or some name like that, very well to do and somethin’ in the City, but ’is other relations I ’aven’t seen.”

Barbara never met Mr Green of the British Museum, nor ever wanted to; but such glimpses

of biography gave an interest to all these total strangers, and kept her a little in touch with life. Occasionally the stories were much more dramatic than the placid annals of Mr Green with his manuscripts and sister at Hampstead. In the solitary lives of the innumerable tenants who had lived behind the old brick walls during the centuries they had endured, there was no lack of romance, farce, and tragedy, and a historian no more learned than Mrs Muffet could tell some singular tales.

"There was a gentleman lived once in these very rooms, miss, which 'is name I never knowed, but I've 'eard as gospel truth, 'e kep' a life-size picter of the young lydy wot had jilted 'im, and all day 'e'd sit a-starin' at it and a-mopin', and all night too like as not, and a-talkin' too so as you could 'ear 'im if you put your 'ead against the door, which is 'ow they found out at last, and 'im by that time off 'is 'ead and shut up there for ten days without food or drink."

"Ten days!" exclaimed Barbara. "He would have starved to death!"

"Bless you, that ain't nothin', my dear!" said Mrs Muffet with an indulgent contempt for such ignorance of the possibilities of history as edited by a fearless imagination. And she went on to tell of the poor drunken poet who literally did

starve to death in Number 10, after an abstinence (she took her most solemn oath) of six whole weeks.

Tales of solitude ; all her stories were tales of solitude, and mostly tragedies of solitude. People lived in water-tight compartments here ; a dozen to a couple of dozen in-dwellers sleeping at the tops of the various stairs above the offices and under the tiles, each shut up with his own heart behind a heavy locked and iron-bound door of oak, and the whole colony lodged at the eastern end of the Strand amid shops and offices and theatres and slums, so that even an intimate friend might hesitate to take so long a walk and at the end possibly only wake the echoes of a deserted staircase with his knocking. One might have thought that this particular solitary tenant, more completely divorced than most from the life outside, would have felt her spirits sink and her courage ebb at these relations. But singularly enough they only increased her interest in her venerable lodging, or, at the most, affected her with such a pleasant melancholy as one procures from reading a story that does not touch oneself.

Yes, her spirit was strangely gay considering her isolation and alien surroundings, and her mind genially occupied. And, curious to relate, this contentment dated from that Sunday morn-

ing when her neighbour came in and made a friend and ally of her. Now she had plenty to do and plenty to think about, and an interest had come into her life that grew and grew in spite of all she could do to keep it at just the height she wished. Never before had she been seriously and spontaneously interested in a man, an actual man, a creature belonging to a sex she had hitherto known almost entirely through story-books. Yet she did not think it odd that this should be so; that would have implied that she frankly admitted the interest. But she sometimes wondered vaguely why she was so absorbed in present circumstances, and why she thought so little about the past and even about the future.

In money matters she had had a little wind-fall. Lesley, who apparently did some spasmodic journalism that he was not very proud of and referred to seldom, had taken off three or four of her sketches and returned with three sovereigns for her. He had pooh-poohed her thanks, and when she wished to see them after they were published, had sardonically replied that if she did she would take to a more respectable employment; but she had felt decidedly proud of herself and extremely grateful to him. With her simple mode of life,—eating always in her rooms what she or Mrs Muffet

could cook on the gas-stove, and spending next to nothing otherwise,—this money gave her a lift along that she was badly needing, and it took off her mind the last worry that was interfering with this new interest. She began to think that she might even hold out till the Harlows returned to town. And thus the days went by.

One windy evening she sat before her writing-desk, the last picture for the book almost finished, and her thoughts wavering irresolutely. Before she actually finished it she wished to see the author, for he was very particular that everything must precisely suit his ideas; and the author for some reason stayed away. She had heard him come upstairs, and almost thought she heard some one with him; but as no sounds came through the walls, and he always kept so rigorously to himself, she had come to the conclusion that she was mistaken. But should she go and fetch him? It was a thing she carefully never did, to make the first advances even on a slight occasion such as this. But she wanted to finish the drawing, and she was feeling a little dull, and the wind was making a very mournful noise.

“I’ll just knock and tell him to come. He said he wanted the pictures finished as soon as possible,” she said to herself suddenly, and up she got and opened the door.

His door was opening too at the same instant, and she stood for a moment at her threshold holding the dressing-gown round her. Then with a quick movement she stepped back and slammed her oak again, her face scarlet and her body trembling. She had not seen much, only a glimpse of another woman, and she reasoned nothing logically and clearly from the apparition, but every word Mrs Muffet had said about him rushed suddenly into her mind. And yet it was not the discovery that the words were true which shook her most, it was the thought of another—another woman. She did not stop to ask why, but that idea was somehow or other in itself, and, taken with the other, shameful and unbearable.

She stood for a little while half leaning against the edge of the table, and trying to collect her scattered thoughts, when she heard him knocking on her door. At first she remained where she was and let him knock, but at last, as he seemed determined to have an answer, she opened it a little way and looked out.

“What do you want?” she asked sharply, with an odd note in her voice that astonished him.

“To come in.”

“I am going to bed.”

"I want to see you first."

"You can't."

"I must."

"Why?"

"On business."

"What is it?"

She had opened the door a little wider at this, and she made no resistance when he pulled it further and came in, but her face was cold and her eyes were angry.

"I can't tell you through an oak door," he said with a laugh, but it ceased when he looked at her more closely.

"Anything the matter?" he asked.

"Nothing."

"Something is the matter," he insisted.

"Indeed?"

"What is it?"

"If you know, you had better tell me."

He had seen specimens of this spirit before, but never such a display as this.

"I want to know whether you have finished that drawing," he said quietly.

"No, I haven't."

"When will it be ready?"

"I don't know."

"I have heard to-night from our publisher. If he is going to take the book at all, he must see it at once."

"Indeed?"

He looked at her for a moment and then shook her by the shoulder.

"Don't be an ass!" he cried.

With a swift indignant movement she swung herself free and placed half the room between them. Her eyes were blazing now, but she said not a word.

"When will you have that thing ready?" he repeated.

"To-morrow. Is that all?"

"All just now; but I'd like to come in and see it first."

"You needn't trouble."

She bit her lip to prevent more from coming, and then, to save herself, could not help adding—

"You may have company."

He looked at her hard, and understood a little. The suspicion that that might be the cause of his friend's temper had indeed crossed his mind, but only to be dismissed as too fantastic even for such an odd boy as Philip Brown. Even now it seemed insufficient. He had often talked of liberty of conduct in an abstract way and the right to do as one liked, and his friend had appeared amused and rather acquiescent.

"You mean because I have had company to-night?"

Now this was just precisely the point on which Barbara had desired neither explanation nor discussion. But she had brought it on herself, and her friendship with Lesley, brief though it was, had taught her something of masculine candour.

"Yes," she said, after an instant of hesitation.

"I think," said Lesley, "that in the matter of the company we keep, we had each better mind our own business. No questions, no comments; I thought that was to be the rule. Wasn't it?"

"I asked no questions."

"You made a devilish pronounced comment!"

She utterly refused to smile, or even to abate the rigour of her half-averted glance.

"Is that all now?" she asked coldly.

"Yes," he said, and started for the door; but half-way he stopped. "I say," he asked, "what is the matter really? There's something else in the wind, I'm sure, and we are like a couple of men on a raft: we can't afford to quarrel over trifles."

"Trifles!" she exclaimed; and again she would have recalled the word if she could.

"Is there anything else?" he repeated.

"No," she said coldly.

He looked at her again doubtfully and curiously, and then, with a brief "good-night," he was gone.

“Pa-ast—eleven!” boomed the voice of the night-watchman in the quadrangle, and it sounded to Barbara like a dirge for the death of all things good and pleasant.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A MOMENTOUS DISCOVERY.

In the course of the next morning Lesley came in. He looked at the picture, praised it briefly, collected all the drawings and manuscript, and tied them together to take to the publisher's office. Neither of them spoke much, Barbara scarcely at all, and a veil seemed to have descended between them.

Just before he left he turned to her and said—

“You must understand one thing, Brown; that I am a different kind of man from you—older and worse. But you don't know what a twisting I had in my youth. I was hammered in one direction and rebounded in the other.

He smiled a little, but she did not reply with a smile.

“My visitor last night——” he went on.

“I don't want to know anything about her,”

said Barbara quickly ; and then with more composure, but not without some bitterness, added, " I thought we were each to mind our own business."

" I didn't mean to be rude when I said that," he began to explain ; but she cut him short again.

" I know what you meant quite well."

" You don't," he replied, and with a nod went out.

Her heart was very hard against him, and she had tried not to look at him at all. Yet she could not help thinking that he seemed unusually pale this morning, and had something fragile in his air that would have appealed to her on any other day. But not now ; she would not think of him at all. She turned to find something else to occupy her, and then suddenly it came home to her that her occupation and her friend were gone together. What a horrible lonely place this old Inn was !

This was the most miserable day she had spent in those yellow panelled rooms since that afternoon when she first came there. Though spring was now well advanced, a high bleak wind was still blowing, making her fire smoke lugubriously and stealing in chilly draughts through the ill-fitting old windows, under the door, everywhere that cold air could penetrate.

The pictures on the walls, which she had hitherto liked, became tiresome and irritating to look at; the books in the bookcase yielded no consolation; the view from the window—gravel court and garden and old buildings—struck her as utterly alien and forlorn.

“How can I escape?” she asked herself as fervently as she had asked it that last morning at Fogo.

Night came at last; but for hour after hour it brought no sleep, and in the darkness and silence certain thoughts were much harder to elude. She had beaten them back all day, but now they came hammering riotously on the gates of her mind, till they got a hearing. And they all resolved themselves into one question: Why did the conduct of this man, a chance acquaintance, a friend of a few weeks—why did it affect her so? She could give it no answer that satisfied her, and at last, towards four in the morning, sleep came.

When Mrs Muffet called her, and brought the broad daylight into her room, she felt so drowsy that at first she resolved not to get up for a while. But suddenly a remark of the garrulous old lady woke her completely.

“Pore Mr Lesley, I don't know wot may be the matter with 'im, but he does seem uncommon bad this morning.”

"Is he ill?" asked Barbara.

"He oughter see the doctor, miss, that's certing. I tells 'im so myself, I says——"

"Why don't you fetch the doctor?" interrupted Barbara.

"Mr Lesley 'e wouldn't 'ear of it."

"You are sure he is really ill?"

"Certing, my dear. A pusson doesn't 'ave my experience and not know when a pusson's ill."

"Tell him that you are going to fetch the doctor, then, and don't mind what he says."

Presently Mrs Muffet went off, and Barbara rose and dressed in haste. Why she hurried she would have found it hard to say. The vision of Lesley's pallid face and delicate look yesterday morning seemed to spur her on. Certainly he was ill, she thought, much worse than he knew himself.

In the course of the day she learned that the doctor had come, and been very strict in his injunctions that the invalid was to keep his bed for some days.

"And he told me to see that he kep' there," added Mrs Muffet, who brought the news. "He won't say *wot* may 'appen if he don't."

Barbara gathered from her redundant description that he had contracted some kind of internal chill, and being run down already, bed and

nursing would be needed for a week or so, at the very least. She let Mrs Muffet talk on, saying very little herself, till all at once she seemed to make up her mind for action.

"He has no one to look after him?" she asked.

"Pore gentleman, he 'asn't—that I *can* say for certing."

"Do you think he would mind if I came in and saw him now and then?"

"'Im mind, my dear!" exclaimed Mrs Muffet. "Bless your kind heart, miss, that was just wot I was a-thinkin' myself. I was a-sayin' to myself, 'Mrs Muffet,' says I, 'that there pore young gentleman needs more nussing nor you can give 'im. 'Ow about Miss?' says I."

(I may say that Barbara, with remarkable discretion, had restricted her to the use of "Miss" in speaking to her, thus diminishing the risk of her letting slip another name in speaking of her.)

" "'Ow about Miss?' she continued. 'Bein' a case of life and death, per'aps——'"

"Is it so bad as that?" cried Barbara.

"You never knows," said Mrs Muffet with something almost like relish in the possibilities of the situation.

She left his key with Barbara, and a little later Mr Philip Brown was tapping gently upon his bedroom door.

"Come in!" he said cheerfully enough; but when he saw who it was the cheerfulness suddenly expanded till he looked almost too gay to be an invalid. Nothing was the matter with him, he assured her; at the worst, he would only be in bed till to-morrow.

"You'll stay in bed till you are told to get up," she replied with a smile that wiped out for both of them all traces of their difference.

Then she set about making things comfortable, and as he lay watching her he was astounded at the kind of touches she employed and the effects she accomplished. There seemed a sort of feminine instinct in these matters about the boy, a curious sympathetic intuition of what was soothing, a grace not generally vouchsafed to men.

She, on her part, was thinking how bare and homeless a room this was, worse far than the sitting-room, for there he had gathered the few household gods he possessed. And she was feeling a sense of exultation leap through her, a joy at being occupied—well occupied, with a congenial bit of work, and at showing her friend how capable she could be. Hitherto his had been the directing hand; even her illustrations for the book were largely suggested by him. But now she had her innings, and she meant to make the most of the wicket.

Again in the evening she came in, and talked to him for a little and read to him for a little longer, and left him at last full of keenness over the prospect of a week of this. But on the next morning she found him, to her consternation, bent on getting up, and a debate ensued that became at last almost acrimonious.

"I must!" he persisted.

"Again, tell me why! What really and truly is the necessity?"

He hesitated.

"There's absolutely none," she declared.

"You know I do some eighth-class journalism. It is a few degrees worse than most crimes, but it can't be committed in bed."

"It must wait."

"I must live."

He held up two letters which had come that morning.

"Do you see these? Bills! And the people won't wait. I owe Mrs Muffet for three weeks already. And I haven't a whole sovereign to my name."

"How much do you need?"

"A thousand a-year; but a fiver I must have at once. Brown, let me up!" He made a movement as though he would spring out of bed.

"Wait," she cried. "Don't be silly; I can lend you five pounds easily."

She spoke as confidently as though she kept a sack of bullion in her room, though in reality she was calculating up the risks of writing to Rose for the rest of her twenty pounds.

"You?" he asked; and then, falling back exhausted with his effort, maintained in a weak voice, "you know you can't."

"I can; and I shall write to-day."

And at last she had her way, and left him expostulating and thanking her, to write that letter to Rose whose arrival and effects we have already seen. It was a risky thing to do, to let her address be known to any one at Fogo, and she had meant to keep this resource for the last extremity; but now that her letter was despatched she felt extraordinarily and profoundly elated at the thought of the service she was rendering.

It was written and posted early in the afternoon, and a little later she thought it time to again visit her patient. Indeed she now felt restless shut up by herself. So she went to his bedroom and listened at the door. Nothing but a heavy and regular breathing to be heard. He must be asleep; and, assuming the privileges of a nurse, she took a book at random from the few in his shelves and sat in the one easy-chair of the sitting-room. Her mind was not at all disposed for reading, and as she turned idly over

the pages she only noticed that the book was old and dusty and the contents the story of Robinson Crusoe. And then, as petrifying as the footprint in the tale, the owner's name opened under her fingers, and she read these words, written in a hand she knew too well—

“To Lesley Clestran, from his father.”

CHAPTER XXVII.

BARBARA LEARNS IT ALL.

A noise in the bedroom startled her. She hastily put ‘Robinson Crusoe’ back on the shelf, and then instinctively, before going to her patient, looked for a minute out of the window that she might realise where she actually was. How long she had been musing, oblivious to everything but this astounding discovery, she had no notion; it might have been half an hour—or two hours. Lesley Clestran—the disinherited son—here beneath the same roof with her. What did it all mean? It meant, she felt, that Fate was playing a very strange trick upon them both. But it also meant something more significant; she was sure—in her heart convinced, without need of

reason—of that. And she consciously made no effort to pry into the meaning further than this—that she was sent to help him.

Having arrived at this conclusion to her musings, she entered his bedroom and found him awake and ready to be talked to. But how could she talk as Philip Brown to his friend Lesley, just as if nothing had happened? She wanted to make him talk; and though it was quite wrong of a nurse, she never checked him when she found that on his side he was nothing loth. It must have been the fever in his blood that relaxed his usual reticence and made him tell her more than he had ever told before; but it seemed to her as though her discovery had changed the atmosphere and mysteriously affected him.

“It is very good of you to lend me that money,” he said; “and I feel rather a brute for taking it, because I might have enough if I wanted, only I won’t take it.”

“That seems as though you were rather foolish.”

“Foolish? Obstinate, perhaps; but then I come of an obstinate stock.”

Too well she knew that, but she gave no answer except a glance that seemed to ask for more.

“I won’t be beat,” he murmured half to himself.

"By what?" she ventured to ask.

"By a man who calls himself my father."

He paused, and then said with a frown—

"You see I am telling you things after all."

"I like to hear them," she assured him; and he felt her sympathy irresistibly drawing him on.

"Ours is an entailed estate, and he wants to cut me off, but he can't without my consent. So he is trying to starve me into yielding. I should get an annuity if I did,—and then go to the devil any way I liked. But I won't. I'll beat him yet."

"Why does he want to cut you off?"

"We were always antipathetic. His principles were—system, duty. Mine were—liberty, sentiment. He always touched the wrong note, and when he heard a discord he simply sat on the key-board. And he is a heavy man."

"And that was all."

"There were incidents. I wrote a skit on one of his theories and sent it to the local paper. I slacked at Oxford. There was a girl. Oh, I don't defend myself, but he gave no second chances. I was cut off with fifty pounds a-year. He thought I'd starve on that till I yielded. But I didn't,—not quite. Then he wanted to marry again; some young girl—one of his theories, I suppose. I had to go definitely, and

he stopped the fifty pounds. He came up to town—just the other day—and spent a week trying to bully me; talking reasonably, he called it. But I'm not quite done for yet."

They were both silent. She knew the whole story now, but it was he who spoke again first.

"I suppose you think me a fool for my pains?"

"No; oh no, I don't!"

"I shouldn't give in?"

"Never!"

Never, she determined in her heart, would she allow this injustice to be done. And how nearly she had been the very cause of his succumbing at last! If he was disinherited now it would all be through the lack of that fifty pounds a-year of which she had robbed him. Yes, she had taken it out of his pocket, she who—who liked him so much. How fortunate that she had been guided by Providence to Number 6 Our Lady's Inn! But now they were two together to contend against that hard and unjust man.

So she thought while she sat with him; and when she was alone again she kept on thinking the same warm moving thoughts. She owed him that ten pounds—the whole of it; and though when it came she dared not offer him more than he wanted, she laid the rest by in

case he needed it again. Fervently she thanked Heaven that she was here to help, nurse, lend money, do anything to atone.

It may be that our heroine took too blindly partial a view of the case, and had much better have considered what there might be to say on behalf of the parent; it may be that she was banding herself with the powers of darkness against the light of pure reason; it may even be that what she thought was a sense of indebtedness to the man she had unwittingly helped to wrong was really mingled with another sentiment. But the fact remains that there awoke in her a sense of responsibility that coloured her life from that day onwards. So that, judging by results, there is perhaps a little to be said for her.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A PARCEL COMES TO OCHIL CASTLE.

"What the devil's this?" exclaimed Sir Andrew Dunsappie.

"Jist your own claes, sir," replied his butler.

"The deuce and all!" murmured the astonished baronet.

It was, in fact, a brown-paper parcel which had just arrived at Ochil Castle, and which, upon Dougie's cutting the string, now revealed the long-lost tweed suit. Portion by portion the servant held it up to its native sunlight, while the master examined it inch by inch as though he were looking for a message woven in somewhere.

"There's a deuced funny wrinkle here," he remarked at last, in the excited tones of one who is on the track of a solution.

"Ay, there's been a tuck put intilt."

"A tuck? By Gad, now! Miss What-d'ye-may-call-it must have put that in herself!"

"I see nae other way of it. The impident hussy!"

"Hoots, toots, Dougie," expostulated his master. "Keep your bad language for folk that deserve it. Miss Cheyne is a very fine young lady. D'ye hear me?"

"Ay, sir," said the unabashed Dougie, "I hear ye; but I'm thinkin' leddies like yon will be cheap enough in London, if a' they say is true."

"Dougie, confound it! D'ye not hear me? You're not to say another word against that—er—charming young lady, or by Gad—or—I'll be deuced angry."

As usual, this amiable man had vented his

annoyance in the first words of his sentence, and in consequence finished a little lamely.

"A' the same, it's queer on-goings for one that's a leddy born," maintained Dougie. "Ye must admit that, Sir Andra."

"A lady born can do things another sort of lady can't," replied Dunsappie. "It is one of the privileges of birth that you don't have to trouble about your gentility. Look at me; there's no one can say I'm not a gentleman, eh?"

"The king himself hasna better blood in his veins! Gentleman! Ye may weel say that."

"Well, you know I don't need to stand upon my dignity and all that. I just treat one man the same as another, and I talk with you, Dougie, just as I talk with Mr Clestran or any of them. You see that, do you?"

"I've aye said, sir, when I saw one of thae stuck-up fine gentlemen: 'Him gentry? I've lived wi' the real kind long enough to know better than that!' Dougie declared with much conviction.

"Well, then, do you not see that Miss Cheyne—who is one of the Cheynes of Gowdenlinks—can wear my breeks if she has a mind to? Man, it's the breeks that are favoured! And you know fine you'd lend your own to the first pretty lass that asked you!"

Having thus with ingenuity and dignity de-

fended the character of Miss Cheyne and laid down a valuable law of conduct, the baronet, still chuckling over his last argument, made a final inspection of the clothes before consigning them to the chaos of his wardrobe; for as yet he had taken no steps to profit by Mr Clestran's advice about these receptacles.

"Have you searched the pockets?" he asked.

"Every one of them," said Dougie.

"And there's nothing left in them? Not a clue of any sort? No old bills or anything?" persisted Dunsappie, with a recollection of the things most often left by himself.

"Naething at all, Sir Andra; they're remarkable empty, in fac'."

"Well, well," said Sir Andrew with a sigh of resignation. "I've got back my clothes anyhow—but I'd have liked to have had some news of their adventures."

He lit his pipe, put up his feet on the sofa, and once more became immersed in the book he had been reading when the parcel arrived to enliven the even tenor of life at Ochil Castle. For what between want of money and want of energy, his existence in that feudal keep was passed in a monotonous succession of uneventful days. This had been particularly the case since his rupture with his old friend Pittentrews; so much so indeed that, inured though

he was to indolence and calm, he had more than once experienced an unwonted sense of boredom.

"By Gad! I hoped something might have come of that," he said to himself. "Things are deuced slow here now."

He vaguely thought of going away for a change, as indeed he had vaguely thought for years, but as usual the thought placidly died away again, and he had almost forgotten the incident, when not only his reading this time but the whole quiet of his existence was abruptly and remarkably disturbed.

"Here's a gey queer thing!" exclaimed Dougie, bursting into the room with an air of unwonted excitement.

In his hand he held a scrap of paper, and in his countenance it was easy to distinguish a sentiment of mysterious self-importance as well as the excitement aforesaid.

"What the deuce?" demanded his master.

"Yon pockets were not so empty as we thought, Sir Andra."

"You don't mean to say you've found anything after all?"

"Deed have I. I found this piece paper ahint the flap o' the left-hand pocket when I was putting it straight to fauld up. See what ye think o' it yoursel', sir."

Sir Andrew took the piece of paper and looked at it with as much excitement as though it had contained a message from Mars; and indeed it was a strange enough discovery. The actual paper seemed to be a ruled page torn out of a note-book, and on it were written these words—

“Coming in to see you to-night. Too busy this afternoon.—LESLEY.”

“If that’s no’ young Maister Lesley Clestran’s handwriting, I ken naething aboot it!” exclaimed Dougie as he watched the effects of the perusal upon his master’s face.

“By God, it is! What the devil, Dougie——?”

“Ay, that’s just it, sir. What the devil is that daeing in yon young leddy’s pockets?”

Both master and man had known Lesley Clestran well from his childhood up. In fact, Dunsappie’s previous nearest approach to a rupture with his old friend had been when Mr Clestran dismissed his son for good, for the baronet had sided against the father as strongly as he dared. He now pondered in silent astonishment while he turned the paper this way and that, vainly trying to extract some further light from it.

“It wasna there when Miss Cheyne took the claes away?” asked Dougie.

“No; certainly not!”

"Then she's put it in the pocket hersel'; *that's* clear, sir."

"And therefore this note was written to Miss Cheyne by Lesley Clestran. By God, Dougie, this is an uncommon queer business!"

With their wisest air the two counsellors studied the paper afresh, and racked their brains to evolve a theory ingenious enough to meet the case.

"This paper has been folded four times," declared Dunsappie with his shrewdest look, "and then either placed in an envelope or else slipped straight into her hand, for it has no address written upon it."

"And that makes it a' the queerer, sir," said Dougie profoundly.

But none of these deductions could help at all to explain how Barbara Cheyne had come to know so quickly, and apparently so intimately, this young man whom she had never met before, and who, one would think, would be the last person for her to seek. At length, after a number of speculations, which, though often highly creditable to their combined imaginations, were so independent of the real facts of this narrative that they need not be quoted here, Sir Andrew came to the more practical question of what should be done next.

"The first thing *you* have to do, Dougie,"

he impressed upon his butler, "is to hold your tongue tighter than you've ever held it yet within my experience."

"Ye may trust me, sir," said Dougie with a solemnity that ought to have silenced the doubts of a detective. Dunsappie, however, who had a thirty years' experience of his retainer's discretion, was by no means so easily satisfied.

"It is an affair which touches the honour of a distinguished family, a house allied to my own, what's more," he said, with that slightly stilted dignity displayed by every Scotchman of old family when referring in a serious spirit to his lineage. "Heaven knows what may be at the bottom of this note, Dougie! The reputations of at least four people—including myself—are at stake. Mind that."

Having thus elicited still more profound expressions of loyalty and trustworthiness from the now preternaturally self-important Dougie, the baronet proceeded to the further point of what active step was to be taken. Here, however, he showed to less advantage than when advocating a policy of dignified reticence; for no sooner had he begun to actually contemplate a plunge from the calm of Ochil into the troubled waters of other people's business, than his natural indolence awoke (if this be an admissible figure of speech) and proceeded to remind him of a

number of considerations that had escaped the observation of his first enthusiastic zeal. Without going to Thomas Clestran, he reflected, he could not advance matters at all, for he was still entirely ignorant of where either Lesley or Miss Cheyne was living, beyond the fact, gathered from the post-mark of the parcel, that it was in London. Besides, Mr Clestran might himself have already heard of the business. Then, again, he might receive him in the same hostile spirit he displayed on the last occasion they met. Furthermore, he was not at all certain that it would be wise to reveal what he knew to that headstrong and overbearing gentleman. And finally, it was really none of his business, and he might very likely merely burn his own fingers without doing anybody else any good.

It was now that Dougie rose to the occasion, and more than justified his interference in the concerns of his betters. Whether he was actuated by a mere desire to ferret out this promising scandal and satisfy his own inordinate curiosity, or inspired by more altruistic motives, really matters little. It is sufficient that he urged his master with zeal and craft to investigate the matter at all costs.

"Ye needna say what it is precisely ye've learnt, sir," he argued. "Jist throw out a few

hints and see how he takes them. Dinna let on ye've heard aught about Maister Lesley, but jist get his address in a kin' o' quiet canny way."

Sir Andrew had been for so many years accustomed to let Dougie and Mr Clestran between them direct his movements and inspire him in the fields of action, reserving only his freedom of reflection and criticism, that even in a delicate matter like this he ended by submitting to his butler's judgment and ordering his trap for that afternoon. His adviser's officiousness did not stop here, for he further signified his opinion that a drive would be an excellent thing for his own constitution. And to this the baronet agreed with that readiness to adopt any suggestion presented to his mind, which gave him in some ways a decided resemblance to those hypnotic "subjects" who so greatly divert an audience at the Aquarium by their automatic obedience to the gentleman who bids them swallow mustard or act as steam-engines.

CHAPTER XXIX.

DUNSAPPIE IS ENTRUSTED WITH A MISSION.

It was fine spring weather when they started upon their drive to Pittentrews, and the trees were now green, and even that bare east-coast countryside smiling and friendly and cheerful. Dunsappie, who had an excellent ear for music among his accomplishments, was so elated at finding himself in the spring air and outside the gloomy precincts of Ochil that he started humming a variety of national melodies, while his factotum listened to this outburst with the most portentous solemnity. But as they approached the shore and the woods of Pittentrews an easterly haar came stealing up from the North Sea, so that when they turned in at the gates and drove up the avenue, trees and fields and hedgerows were all shrouded in a cold and gloomy mist. The house itself remained invisible till they were close upon it, and when at last it loomed out of the fog, looking like some gigantic Egyptian temple, the very sight of it struck a chill into Dunsappie's kindly heart. Wrapped in its cold white cloak, it seemed to him like a prison where the miserable

were doomed to languish, and he could not help feeling that the heart of the man within must match this gloomy abode.

This fancy did not quit him even when he found himself waiting for his old friend in the most perfectly appointed and inhabited-looking room of the house. This was Mr Clestran's library and special sanctum, a spacious chamber where he kept not only his books but all his guns and rifles in a glass case, and, above the shelves, the antlers and masks that told of his prowess as a sportsman. It was a cheerful and comfortable place as a rule, with its long windows looking on to a lawn shaded by high beech-trees; but to-day Sir Andrew, when he looked out, only saw cold white fog, and he seemed to feel the air charged with desolation. It was here, seated before the fireplace, now black out of compliment to the season rather than the temperature, that his host had told him with such enthusiasm of his matrimonial plans, and he had wrung his hand in half-envious congratulation.

"Poor old Tom Clestran," he said to himself, and shuddered a little as he looked out into the easterly haar.

When Mr Clestran entered, the greeting on both sides was constrained but perfectly friendly. The baronet was exceedingly embarrassed how

best to begin, and Mr Clestran more dignified and grave than ever. But after a few common-places about the weather and not having seen each other for some time, a decanter and a syphon appeared, the box of irreproachable cigars was opened, and Dunsappie began to feel himself again.

"You haven't been going about much lately, have you?" he said.

"I have naturally been at no particular pains to encourage the comments of fools."

This was the first allusion to what had happened, and Dunsappie stoutly followed it up.

"I say, Clestran," he said, with his blue eyes looking in the most friendly way out of their surrounding freckles, "I'm deuced sorry for quarrelling with you."

A kindlier look came over Mr Clestran's stern features.

"I was to blame," he declared. "That is to say, I admit I was too hasty in coming to a conclusion."

"And I was a devilish sight too hasty in resenting it!" said Dunsappie so heartily that the last traces of coldness between them melted away. And now that his tongue was loose, Sir Andrew hurried on with his old readiness—

"You're not worrying your head still, I hope."

"I am endeavouring to forget that I made an exhibition of myself; but as it is not a customary antic with me, I confess I do not find it so easy as I ought."

There was a mixture of unusual candour and unusual bitterness in this that showed Dunsappie how far from composed his friend's mind must be.

"You're not thinking about her still? Forgive me, old man, if I'm asking—er—anything I shouldn't."

Mr Clestran was silent for a minute. Then he answered—

"She has gone out of my life, and why should I give her another thought? A woman, Dunsappie, who deceives a man as she deceived me I regard in this way——"

"I know, I know," Dunsappie interrupted hastily, for he perceived that his old friend's love of prolix explanations had evidently survived his disappointment. "Yes, I know she treated you devilish cavalierly, but then remember she was just a child."

Again Mr Clestran was silent.

"You still consider that my treatment of her was—er——" He paused for a word, and again his friend hastily interposed.

"Just a wee bit too grown-up. That's all. I'd have done the same thing myself."

"Dunsappie," said Mr Clestran deliberately, "you are a good fellow, and I wish I had considered your advice more carefully."

Never in the whole course of their acquaintance had he made a speech even remotely resembling this, and Sir Andrew was struck dumb with astonishment, which in a moment became a warmer emotion. Thomas Clestran's mind must have been undergoing a very painful ordeal to bring him to such a point as this. But unluckily, before he had collected his wits to reply, his friend had changed the subject, and for a time he feared that his chance of sounding him was gone.

At length, after a pause in their talk, Mr Clestran abruptly asked—

"Have you heard what has become of her?"

"I—I think I could get you news. Would you like to hear?"

"You know nothing at present?"

"Not exactly at present."

"But you could find out?"

"I believe I could."

"Through Mrs Strynd?"

"God forbid!" exclaimed the baronet hastily, with a vividly unpleasing recollection of his last interview with that lady. "I mean I am certain she doesn't know what has happened. But I

might put you in the way of finding something out, if you like."

Mr Clestran thought in silence, and then said—

"To some extent I feel myself responsible—that is, you understand, I should not wish her to come to any harm through her rashness. I mean——"

"I quite understand, old man."

"Then will you be kind enough to make inquiry, and let me know the result? Of course I shall—I mean I can, take no step myself. *That* is clear, I think."

"Perfectly," said Dunsappie, though with rather less readiness as he began to see what was in store for himself.

"Do you know where she is?"

"Nothing more than that she is in London."

"London?"

Mr Clestran frowned and reflected.

"Do you mind going up to town and making inquiries?"

"Er—delighted. That is—yes, rather, if you want me to."

"Thank you."

Mr Clestran had now resumed his old *rôle* of dictator, and his friend felt himself helpless before his energetic will. His next command, however, was exceedingly satisfactory.

"Please put down all your expenses to my charge. We know one another well enough for that."

Sir Andrew hemmed and hawed and protested ; but the order was given, and, as usual, he had to obey. It was arranged that he should start without delay, and after a few more words he rose to go. Not a question did Mr Clestran put regarding the source of his information. Indeed he carefully avoided showing any further trace of curiosity.

"By the way," said the baronet, as if struck with a sudden thought, "would you mind giving me Lesley's address? I'd like to look him up when I'm in town."

Mr Clestran frowned very heavily this time, but he went to his desk, wrote down an address, and handed it to Dunsappie.

"You can find him there if you wish," he said. "But, mind you, I have no communication with him myself, nor shall I ever have again."

A firm grip of his friend's muscular hand and the baronet was off once more, driving through the haar from that house of solitude. As they got farther away from the sea the mist thinned out and at last dispersed completely, and they were in the spring sunshine again. It was from this circumstance that for days afterwards Dunsappie was haunted by the idea that a perpetual

cold and clammy shroud enfolded the man and the house at Pittentrews.

But now that he himself was in the sunlight again, he turned down his collar and felt disposed for conversation.

"I am going up to London, Dougie," he informed his factotum.

"I was thinking it would end in that, sir."

"The deuce you were? You didn't say so."

"There's no use being optimeestic ower soon."

"Optimistic! It's a damned nuisance."

"Gaun to London? Why, ye havena been near there for fifteen years, Sir Andra. It's time ye went and saw the fashions and had a bit fling, sir."

"The fashions?" smiled Sir Andrew. "Me and the fashions!"

But all the same certain gay youthful recollections began to rise to his memory, and the more he thought over them the less disinclined did he feel for another little fling.

"And we're needing a change," added Dougie presently.

"We?"

"Ye'll no' be able to manage sae well without me, sir."

"Hang it, do you suppose I can afford to travel with a valet nowadays?"

"Oh, we'll see about that, Sir Andra."

Dougie gave a shrewd look at his master, and then added slyly—

“Maybe Maister Clestran mightna grudge _____”

“Oh, damn it!” interrupted Dunsappie hastily.

But it ended by his adopting this suggestion also, and master and man forthwith set about making such preparations as would enable them to cut a suitable figure in the metropolis. A silk hat was discovered and ironed, a frock-coat unearthed from some improbable hiding-place, and a pair of patent-leather boots from another equally unlikely; trousers were pressed, coats brushed, and, in short, within two days Sir Andrew Dunsappie, Baronet, of Ochil, was ready for a season in town.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE ADVENTURE OF MISS BROWN.

The invalid was convalescent,—up and dressed and trying to write again,—while his nurse was feeling very depressed, shut up in her own room with her occupation gone. She felt that she had lost hold of him; gone back to her old unsatisfactory hybrid existence; had her chance,

used it more or less well, and stepped off the stage into the dreary backward parts of the theatre. Perhaps, she said to herself, fresh air was what she needed, for she had been very seldom outside for the past week. And then she had a purchase to make. She was going to return his clothes to Sir Andrew Dunsappie and buy a neat ready-made suit, choosing the fit by her eye and saying it was for her brother. As she planned this she could not help wondering what Lesley would say if he knew how Philip Brown did his tailoring. But he must *never* learn her secret!

Then she paused, and wondered how in that case things were ever going to end.

By this time she was dressed in her quiet coat and skirt, with her heavy veil down and ready to start; so she ended her speculations, and choosing a moment when there was no one to be seen from the window and no one moving on the stair below, hurried out of the Inn by a narrow arched gateway that opened into the slums at the back.

"It is lucky it isn't an Inn full of women, or I should have been noticed long ago," she said to herself.

But the males who worked there were far too busy to mind other people's concerns, and with care she might have come and gone like

this for years. On this particular occasion she got back to the stair of Number 6 without adventure, and when she had come safely past the doors of Mr E. Sellar and Mr Atkinson-Stickitt, she drew up her veil and breathed freely again. She had stopped before her door, and was feeling in her pocket for the key, when a sound behind her made her turn, and, face to face, she confronted her convalescent standing in his open door.

For a fraction of a second she thought it was all up with Philip Brown. Then as she saw a light of wonder rather than knowledge in his eyes, she recovered her stunned senses and boldly asked him—

“Do you know if my brother is in?”

It was strange to see him smile politely as if at a perfect stranger as he answered—

“I think I heard him go out.”

And then he added in a friendly way—

“Are you Miss Brown?”

“Yes.”

“Have you knocked?”

“I was just going to.”

It was a little difficult to keep her countenance as she went through the form of knocking upon the door of her own empty room, and harder still to answer gravely—

"Evidently he is out."

"I'm sorry for that, but he is certain to be back soon. Won't you come in here and wait? I am a great friend of his—Lesley is my name—and I am sure he will approve."

For a moment she hesitated, and then—

"Thank you very much," she said. "I might wait for a few minutes to see whether he comes."

As she went in before him she drew her veil half-way down and tried hard to impress upon herself that, if she could, she must make her manner slightly different from this brother's. And thus with a curious palpitating excitement she waited to see how Lesley Clestran would demean himself to a woman.

At first it was both disappointing and disconcerting. He was so entirely the stranger and so exceedingly polite. After their intimacy and familiarity it almost struck her dumb to be addressed in this way. But soon she found that there were compensations. She felt conscious of a new assurance, a novel sense of power; she was heard with consideration, almost with deference; in a word, she was getting the tribute paid to a woman. She told herself this, and was amused by it, and tried to discount it as a formal show of gallantry; but all the same,

"surely," she thought, "he means it a little, and rather likes me for myself. Or is it just the way he talks to every girl?"

Then more and more she grew conscious of the fact that he was really regarding her with an interest which at the same time he was trying not to make too apparent. It could not be altogether curiosity, for it seemed to embarrass him more than it embarrassed her. And she instinctively knew that antipathy had no part in it. She would have given almost anything she possessed to know exactly what it meant, for she had never seen him quite like this before. Indeed one would say that both these friends must be undergoing some very unusual and stirring experience.

"No doubt you have frequently been told that you are remarkably like your brother," said Lesley.

"I suppose I am."

"The resemblance is extraordinary."

"Poor brother!" laughed Barbara.

"He is a very good-looking young man," said Lesley with unquestionable sincerity; and he was struck with the charming way in which Miss Brown blushed at hearing her brother praised. He felt tempted to praise him again.

"He has been a very good friend to me. I

don't know what I should do without him now."

"Yes ;" the blush again mantled her cheek.

"I cannot tell you of all his kindness," he added, hoping to keep it there.

And indeed it stayed.

"You are not coming to take him away, I hope."

"Not quite yet."

"Please leave him ! You can always come to see him, you know."

"But supposing I live far away ?"

"Live nearer."

"But what if my brother does not want me too near him ?"

"He will fall in my opinion."

"And do you think that will affect him ?"

She waited anxiously for his answer.

"I cannot tell. I know him well, and yet I don't know him at all."

"That must be rather unsatisfactory."

"I think it makes me like him all the better."

He paused, and then added with the most embarrassing directness—

"I am very fond of your brother."

This time Miss Brown blushed with a vengeance, and it seemed to him that she looked more pleased than ever at this confession of

regard. But to his surprise his next remark produced quite a different effect.

"I rather think he likes me."

"What makes you think so?" she exclaimed, and though her face was still flushed, the pleasure seemed gone.

"Possibly I am mistaken," he answered hastily, and with such evident chagrin that Barbara had much ado to keep herself from explaining how much her brother did like him. She contented herself with saying—

"I am sure you are not."

But she inadvertently accompanied this by a look so kind that her host's face cleared completely.

"Thank you," he said, rather awkwardly for him she thought.

But now Miss Brown declared that she could wait no longer, and with an air of reluctance that pleased her exceedingly, he let her go. A little later, stealthily and with infinite precautions, she returned to her brother's apartments, and this time entered without knocking and with the least possible delay on the threshold.

That evening he came across to see her, and in a fever of curiosity and suppressed excitement she waited to hear what he would say about his visitor.

At length he said casually—

"Did you meet your sister this afternoon?"

"No," said Barbara.

"She came to see you, and waited in my room for a short time."

"Oh, did she?"

"Yes."

He smiled, and then added—

"You don't seem much interested in your family."

"Did you expect me to get excited?"

He only laughed,—an absent-minded laugh, she thought, and she waited for more. Nothing came for a little, and then he remarked—

"She is absurdly like you."

"Did you think so?"

"Everybody must notice it. Don't they?"

"I daresay they do."

Again she waited, but not a syllable more did he say regarding Miss Brown. And so that was all the impression she had made!

"He prefers me as a boy!" she said to herself bitterly.

But why she felt bitter at this reflection, and why she should not rather have felt pleased at her successful impersonation of the nobler animal, are questions exceedingly difficult to answer.

CHAPTER XXXI.

IN LOVE.

Reliable information concerning that mystery which woman calls her mind is exceedingly difficult to procure. I find it, for instance, impossible to obtain any table of averages which will show even approximately at what age the first practical thought of love generally enters a young girl's head; while the various isolated instances supplied by the courtesy of friends contradict one another in the most remarkable way. In many cases the contents of a coat and trousers seem to act like a magnet upon one of those little metal ducks, from the age of five to the age of seventy. Round man their thoughts continually revolve, and at his lightest call they start, blush,—and coyly hasten to his arms. At least, such has been the evidence of apparently disinterested friends. But, on the other hand, several authenticated instances have been supplied of maidens who never realised the existence of this emotion till, with a sudden spring like a tiger or an influenza, it had them in its power. And even then they sometimes struggled very hard with their fate.

If this generalisation (which is advanced with great diffidence) be at all true, then Miss Barbara Cheyne must have been an example of the latter class. The idea of falling in love, like the fancy of inheriting a fortune, had no doubt visited her in an abstract or academic way and supplied her with the basis for some entertaining speculations, but these had in no way prepared her for the curious state of mind in which she now found herself. As long as she could she resolutely refused to admit that this was indeed the dread, oft-talked-of malady; but at last, on the evening of one day which had passed without her seeing him at all, she cried within her heart—

“I am in love!”

Whether this confession gave her more pain or pleasure I cannot tell you,—nor could she; but it certainly gave her food for a long night's restless thinking.

Ever since her adventure as Miss Brown a difference had come over their intercourse. Just at first it had a certain tenderness and sense of happiness—or at least it seemed so to her when she looked back. But very quickly it was succeeded by a curious constraint. She felt herself conscious of his glances, suspicious of hidden meanings in his words, annoyed with the familiar matter-of-fact manner which so lately

she had taken as a matter of course, in a state of mind altogether that caused her many pangs of remorse when he was gone. *Then* she would feel quite differently towards him — so differently that she called herself the most capricious creature in the world, and made all kinds of sensible resolutions, which their next meeting gave her an excellent opportunity of breaking.

Very probably it was this moodiness and oddity of manner in his friend that now began to keep Lesley so much away from her. When he was in her room he showed himself more friendly and kinder than ever. But she put this down solely to gratitude for her attention to him when he was ill, for his visits were paid more seldom, and he was more silent while they were together. Besides, she thought, what else could bring him in at all now that she was treating him so oddly?

One day she heard the steps of two people go into his room, and heard only one descend more than an hour later. She flew to the window, her heart beating quickly, to see who his visitor was, but before the visitor had time to reach the square Lesley himself was knocking upon her door; and though he could not see her, she felt ashamed to keep him waiting while she spied upon his guests. After all, how did it concern her even if he was again bringing—well, any

one he chose, into his room? Yet she confronted him with a cold air and a heart still beating fast.

"What news?" he asked, smiling in a perfectly friendly way that nowadays filled her with an almost suffocating sensation.

"None," she replied distantly.

He looked surprised at her tone.

"You are not looking well," he said, after a close glance at her which troubled her exceedingly.

"I am perfectly well, thank you."

"You are certainly not."

"Why should you think so?"

"Why should you treat me like this if you are?"

"Like what?"

"As though I had come to pick your pocket."

"Do I treat you like that?" she asked, with a sudden softening in her voice.

"You do indeed. I am almost afraid to venture in here now. And a short time ago you loaded me with obligations. What's the matter?"

He still had a little the air of an older man who will not stoop too far to humour a younger, but he was evidently anxious to make friends; and suddenly she felt heartily ashamed of herself.

"I am very sorry," she said; "I beg your pardon, and I'll try to behave better."

"While I shall now discharge one of the obligations," he answered. "Here are your five pounds. What, are you afraid of them? They are honestly earned, I assure you."

"I—I don't want them at present."

"Put 'em in a stocking, then. There they are," and he laid them on the table.

"But are you sure you don't need them any longer?"

"I have done with them, I assure you. I'm now a capitalist."

"What! Have you made it up with——?"

"No," he said quickly and emphatically. "But I have got another job. Brown, I'm a damned journalist."

"Weren't you before?" she asked with a spice of her old spirit.

"I was smirched, but now I'm filthy. Yes, I have profited by your good sense so far as to graciously accept a job on a paper, and devote a few hours of my valuable time to it."

He spoke humorously, but it was evident that both his artistic and his "gentle" prejudices were offended by this lapse.

"I am very glad to hear it," she answered warmly.

"I thought you'd be; you won't be con-

tent until you have converted me into an alderman."

For a few minutes they talked in as familiar a way as though their old relations were firmly established again, and then at length he removed the last traces of disquietude from her mind.

"That was one of the paper fellows in my rooms just now," he said.

"Oh," she cried, "I—I wondered."

"No, it wasn't fair company. I'm in every way a reformed character."

"What has reformed you?" she asked, very pleased and yet insatiably curious to know everything about him, and to hear any confidence he would tell her.

He hesitated, and then said abruptly—

"The usual reason. I'm in love."

CHAPTER XXXII.

AN INTERRUPTION.

Lesley sat down upon the arm of the sofa with his back against the yellow panelled wall and an absorbed thoughtful look on his face. In spite of the heterogeneous garments which he always

wore on ordinary occasions, Barbara could not help noticing afresh how well-favoured and unlike most men he was. This thought came to her even in the moment of the flight and dispersion of her day-dreams, and a fine scorn for herself she felt for suffering it to come. So resolved was she to feel and display a more fitting sentiment, that when she saw him still reflecting silently, she remarked in a sharp tone—

“Is that all?”

“All what?”

“Your reason for reform?”

“Does it seem to you a poor one?”

“Very.”

“My friend, you have never suffered yourself.”

“And I hope I never shall if it makes one sit and simper up at the ceiling like a sentimental——”

She checked herself in time from a too unlady-like conclusion to this amicable speech. As for Lesley, his face turned extremely red, and certainly no sign of simper remained.

“A sentimental what?” he asked with considerable heat. “Pray finish your courteous observations!”

She only turned her back in silence, and wondered why he did not leave the room at once. But though at first he seemed as if he were

going to, he apparently thought better of it and lingered still.

"Am I too great a scoundrel to fall in love?" he asked.

"You should know best yourself," she answered coldly.

"That means, you would recommend any girl you knew to avoid me?"

"If I cared for her."

Again his colour rose, and this time he did move away, and without saying anything in reply. But before he reached the door he suddenly stopped, for to the astonishment of both of them it began to open inch by inch of its own accord. When it stood about a foot ajar a bloodshot nose and eye appeared for an instant at the aperture and took a rapid survey of the room. Then the door was swung wide open, and a voice with a strong Scotch accent announced—

"Maister Lesley, here's Sir Andra Dunsappie come to see ye!"

And with an apologetic smile upon his freckled countenance, the baronet of Ochil shambled into the room, the form of his faithful Dougie filling the doorway behind him.

Each of these visitors in his own style was remarkably resplendent. Dunsappie in canary-coloured trousers and a lavender tie looked ex-

actly like a wedding-guest of a generation ago (and indeed his finery had been purchased for such an occasion some twenty years before), while the factotum bore a striking resemblance to a funeral mute enlivened by a button-hole (and, to tell the truth, his garments also did not belie their origin).

"Well, Lesley, lad," said Sir Andrew, "how are you? I knocked at your own door, but deuce an answer could I get, and then Dougie here—you remember Dougie? He's looking a deuce of a swell. What? Ha, ha! Dougie heard your voice, don't you know, and we thought we might take the liberty of routing you out, old man."

During this speech Lesley had wrung the hands of both his visitors, and now he politely directed the baronet's attention to the shrinking and shame-smitten tenant of the room.

"This is my friend Mr Brown—Sir Andrew Dunsappie," he said.

Barbara's salutation consisted in casting her eyes upon the floor and striving to bend her head so low that her blushes might be hidden a little, but she could see that Dunsappie recognised her instantly and fairly started with amazement. He quickly recovered himself, however, and to her intense relief and surprise concealed his sensations beneath an elaborate attack of artificial coughing, so inhuman and unnatural

as to greatly perturb his devoted follower, who murmured audibly—

“He should hae a drink. Dash it, he should hae a drink!”

This eased Barbara's agonies a little, but it was still the most horrible ordeal of all her adventures.

“Excuse my intrusion,” said the baronet, when he had sufficiently regained his composure; and then hastily turning to Lesley, “Well, Lesley, you didn't expect to see me, eh?”

“I never was more surprised in my life.”

“You don't say ‘pleased,’ I notice,” chuckled the baronet, with a surreptitious wink that still further surprised Lesley.

“My dear sir, I'm delighted!”

“Ha, ha!” laughed Sir Andrew. “Delighted, are you? Well, well, I didn't mean to interrupt you here, you know.”

These last words were spoken in a lower tone and accompanied by a glance towards Mr Philip Brown, which would have seemed natural enough were it not for its mysterious slyness.

“I'm uncommonly glad you did look in here,” Lesley assured him. “And I am sure Brown will excuse the visit. Won't you, Brown?”

But Brown could only make an incoherent

murmur, which his friend put down to the depth of offence he had taken; and this made him so uncomfortable that the astute Dougie, who did not know Barbara by sight, and had not hitherto grasped the situation, now suddenly through this false clue perceived the truth. The sudden revelation of all the humorous, scandalous possibilities was too much for his self-control, and with a loud and violent guffaw he bolted out of the room.

"What the devil!" exclaimed the baronet; while Lesley stared and poor Barbara shrank and bowed her head still further.

"What's the matter with Dougie?" asked Lesley.

"Deuce take him! My dear Lesley, it must be seeing you here, don't you know. Rum circumstances—not what he expected—all that kind of thing. Oh, hang it, man! come out and let's speak a word to ye. I daresay Mr—er—Brown will excuse us."

And with the most unusual energy for him, Dunsappie seized his young friend by the arm and half led, half dragged him out.

Barbara never raised her eyes or moved from her position till she had heard them close her outer oak behind them, and then she sank down on the sofa and hid her face in the cushions. All was up with Philip Brown now, she thought.

At that very moment Sir Andrew would be telling the whole story of the unsexed shameless Barbara Cheyne, who had deceived his friend, deceived him, and deceived his friend's son. The narrative would be accompanied by sly winks and innuendoes on the teller's part, and loud guffaws from his odious servant. And what from the listener? Indignation? No; laughter! Lesley would be laughing at her shame.

At the thought of this she sprang up trembling, and then stood listening intently to try and catch some sound of the laughter through the walls and have the worst confirmed. Nothing could be heard, but that served only to console her for a fraction of a second, and then the very silence suggested worse and worse possibilities. She threw herself on her bed and sobbed.

It was the cheerful voice of Mrs Muffet that aroused her.

"Dearie me, miss, whatever is the matter? You've bin cryin'. Wot 'as 'appened?"

The familiar friendly tones brought her suddenly to herself, and even before she answered she had decided what she must do.

"They have found me out, Mrs Muffet! A gentleman who knows me came in. He is with Mr Lesley now, and—and *he* knows too."

"Wot, my dear, Mr Lesley?"

"Yes; so I must go."

"But not to-night! You ain't goin' to-night, miss?"

"I must!"

Already she had begun to fling off the hated clothes, and a little later she was Barbara Cheyne once more. Mrs Muffet assisted her preparations with a heavy heart and a sorely disappointed spirit. Not only was she exceedingly devoted to her young mistress and charge, but for some time past her ideas with regard to "Miss" and her next-door neighbour had undergone a decided change. No longer did she utter warnings; rather was she inclined to encourage confidences and pass the most favourable opinion herself regarding the once suspected Mr Lesley. And now she beheld the end of a romance with a sorrow that could not keep silence.

"But ain't you goin' to say good-bye to Mr Lesley, my dear?" she asked anxiously.

"Mrs Muffet! How can I? What do you suppose he thinks? Besides, he—he doesn't care."

She meant to say this in a tone that implied that she herself did not care either, but to Mrs Muffet this intonation was not apparent. In

fact, she jumped straight to the conclusion that "Miss" did care a good deal.

"'Im not care!" she exclaimed. "Just you give 'im a chance and see! My dearie me, if 'e was to see you now, miss, 'e wouldn't let you go outer this Inn in a 'urry! You do look just beautiful, my dear!"

"Please don't talk nonsense, Mrs Muffet. Mr Lesley and I are nothing to one another, and I don't like to hear you say these things. I—I don't indeed."

She turned away her head as she made this declaration, but though she could not judge of its accuracy by her expression, the sceptical Mrs Muffet took the liberty of entirely doubting her truthfulness. Instead of arguing further, however, she continued the doleful task of assisting in the preparations for Miss Cheyne's second flight. It was arranged that as she was not leaving in the character of Philip Brown, it would be better to wait till dark before driving with her belongings through the Inn; and so, when the shades of evening fell, Mrs Muffet was to bring a cab to the door. Where she was going she had no idea, nor did she care so long as it was far away from Our Lady's Inn.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

IN WHICH SIR ANDREW IS SURPRISED.

When Sir Andrew had got Lesley safely out of the room, he bade Dougie go downstairs and wait for him in their cab,—an order which his retainer most reluctantly obeyed,—and then with a broad grin suggested—

“Well, now, my dear fellow, let us come into your own sanctum and have a bit of a crack. Ha, ha, ha!”

Greatly surprised at his visitor's mysterious mirth, Lesley took him into his room and inquired rather stiffly—

“May I now ask what is the joke, Sir Andrew?”

“The joke, my dear Lesley? God forbid that I should jest if the matter be serious. My dear man, I'll be as solemn as a Free Kirk elder, if that's the way you wish me to take it.”

“Take what?”

“Well, well; let's hear your own account, and then I'll know a little better how things stand.”

The baronet composed his countenance, and assuming his most sympathetic air, awaited with

vast curiosity for the details of this romance. But to his surprise Lesley appeared determined to brazen matters out, just as though he really thought he could hoodwink his visitor any longer.

"My account?" he said. "Well, you see for yourself how things are going with me. Here is my attic; there are my rags. Though as for my prospects, they are improving a little. I've been sent to the devil; but he is said to look after his own, and I am still keeping my tail cocked up. And that's my news. What's brought you to town?"

The baronet was a little disconcerted by this evasion, but he answered cheerfully, if mendaciously—

"I've been getting my rents paid, you see, and I thought I'd have a bit of a fling."

"How did you find my address?"

"Got it from your father."

"Is he—same as usual I suppose?" asked Lesley in an abrupt and indifferent voice.

"Same, I'm afraid, Lesley. A bit upset of late, of course."

"What's the matter?"

Sir Andrew looked at him keenly.

"You didn't hear his engagement was broken off?"

"No," said Lesley. "Was it?"

He looked sharply at his visitor and observed—

“You seem highly amused about it.”

The baronet grew more mystified at this persistent pretence of ignorance. Then suddenly an explanation occurred to him. Perhaps “Brown” had not informed Lesley of his previous acquaintance with Sir Andrew, and so he still imagined his intrigue undiscovered. This situation still further tickled his fancy, and with a sly twinkle in his eye, he remarked—

“Glad to find you have a pleasant neighbour here.”

“Yes, he is an uncommonly nice boy.”

“Boy?”

“Young man then, if you prefer it.”

“Which should you yourself consider to be the more accurate term?” asked the baronet with a penetrating glance.

Lesley looked considerably astonished at this craving for exactitude.

“Hanged if I know. Why?”

“Oh, my dear fellow, it doesn't matter to me. Only I—er—— By the way, his name is Brown?”

“Yes.”

“John Brown—Tom Brown—what Brown?”

“Philip Brown.”

"Ah! I don't know the name, but I seem to know the face."

"Indeed?" asked Lesley with interest, and then at the sight of the baronet's shrewd look, he exclaimed—

"Come, out with it, Sir Andrew! You know something about him: I see it from your face."

"You probably know considerably more than I," said Dunsappie.

"To tell you the truth," confessed Lesley, "I know absolutely nothing about him at all, and I am exceedingly curious to know who and what he is."

He then proceeded to tell Sir Andrew briefly the history of their acquaintance, and his tone was so sincere and his curiosity to learn more so evident that the baronet at last grasped the almost incredible truth that for all these weeks Lesley had actually never guessed Philip Brown's secret. This astounding discovery filled him with so much admiration for Barbara that he could scarcely forbear expressing it heartily aloud.

"What a girl!" he said to himself. "By Gad, what a girl!"

Another difficulty he found was in explaining his own hints regarding his knowledge of the mysterious Brown, for, being a pawky man, always inclined to the least active of any two

courses, he was resolved on a policy of masterly silence. In answer to Lesley's persistent inquiries what he meant by insinuating a knowledge of Philip Brown's antecedents, he could think of no better way out of it than the following concise and luminous declaration :—

“What do I know about him? Well, Gad, you see Lesley, one can't say everything one knows, especially when one's knowledge is confined to—er—speculation and so on. Name of Brown, you say? Can't be the same chap. What? You're sure I'm keeping something up my sleeve? My dear fellow, anything I know, you know—er—unless it's confidential, I'd tell you like a shot. While there's a possibility of a mistake, don't you see, I'd better not. No, by Jove! I'd better not. I say, old man, this is deuced refreshing. I think I'll help myself to another. Where d'ye get your whisky in London? In my young days you'd hardly find an Englishman who knew what whisky was. Heaps drink it now though, I believe.”

And from this point of departure the baronet launched into a disquisition on things past and present, concluding by suddenly remembering an engagement, hurriedly asking Lesley to dine with him at an early date, and escaping to his cab before he had allowed sufficient silence for another awkward question.

"What a girl!" he murmured as he clattered down the wooden stairs. "By Jingo, what a deuced fine girl!"

As to what he should do next in the matter, he decided, after profound meditation, to follow his usual custom and never do to-day what he could possibly put off till to-morrow. Accordingly he dined exceedingly well with a pair of ancient cronies, and to this day cannot distinctly remember how he amused himself afterwards.

Immediately after he had gone, Lesley discovered a letter in his box, and when he had read it he went hastily across to his neighbour's door and spent a few minutes in vainly knocking. An hour later he knocked again, and with the same profitless result. After this he took paper and pen and tried to write, but the circumstances of the afternoon had left a train of thought too absorbing for work, and when the dusk began to gather he did not take the trouble to light his lamp, but sat and smoked and mused.

In this meditative state of mind he scarcely noticed the entry of Mrs Muffet. But she, having deposited a box of candles and half a pound of tea upon the table, continued to fidget about the room as though she wished to open communications. At last she fetched such a sigh that he looked up in surprise and inquired whether anything was the matter.

"I can't 'elp feelin' the loss of a gentleman what I've done for, even if it ain't for so very long, sir," said she.

"Indeed," said Lesley. "Some one leaving the Inn?"

"You may say that, sir."

"Who?"

Again Mrs Muffet sighed.

"I ain't allowed for to tell 'is name, sir."

A suspicion darted through Lesley's mind.

"Not Mr Brown?" he asked.

"'E'd never forgive me if I told you 'is name, sir."

But a very little persuasion appeared to reconcile her wonderfully to the prospect of perpetual excommunication, and, to the shame of the faithless lady be it said, she confided Barbara's purpose to the one man it was being hidden from.

"But I must see him first," said Lesley. "I have a letter for him."

He urged the necessity so strongly and pled so hard, that, regardless of all pledges and promises, she ended the discussion with these words—

"May 'Eaven forgive me! Never in my life 'ave I done sich a thing before as unlock a door to let another gentleman in wot 'ad no business!"

Thereupon she went stealthily to Barbara's

oak, unlocked it with her own faithless key, and hurried downstairs, breathing many ardent hopes for a good issue to her treachery.

Feeling also rather guilty, but nevertheless determined to carry out his purpose, Lesley knocked upon the inner door, and then, opening it before there was time for a denial, he found himself to his huge astonishment confronted by—not his friend Philip, but the flushed face of Philip's sister.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

CUTTING THE KNOT.

Lesley was the first to break the pause of mutual bewilderment.

"Miss Brown!" he said.

But Miss Brown showed no evidence of pleasure at the encounter.

"How did you get in?" she exclaimed.

"I persuaded Mrs Muffet to unlock the door."

"What business had you to do such a thing?"

"I have a most important letter for your brother."

"He is not here."

"He will return, I presume."

"No; he has gone."

"Not for good?"

"Yes—for ever."

"And you?" asked Lesley.

"My cab ought to be here now. So you need not wait."

She tried to say this very coldly and distantly, but unluckily before she could turn her head away he had caught a glimpse of an expression that was neither anger nor aloofness. It looked more like grief, and it kept him still standing beside her.

"Shall I never see you again?" he asked with a sudden vehemence that astonished her beyond measure.

"Me?" she said. "You mean—you mean my brother."

"I mean you."

"What am *I* to you?"

"Everything!"

Though she was almost stupefied with surprise, yet that word in that tone was so delicious that she could have stood for an hour hearing him repeat it. Then she remembered and forced a laugh.

"What nonsense! I know——"

"What?"

"You told my—my brother you were in love with some one else."

"Not 'else'; I meant with you."

And then he told her his secret, that from their first and only meeting he had loved her.

"It sounds absurd," he admitted; "but I felt I knew you, I felt I had met you often before, and it never seemed absurd to me."

"But—but," she pled, "it is absurd! If I have only met you once, how can you suppose I—I could care for you?"

"I know—I know you think me possessed. And I believe I am." Her air was so surprisingly propitious that he could afford to smile as he said this; and though her eyes were turned away she could feel the love in his. "I must confess one thing," he said—"Lesley is only half my name. The rest of it is——"

But at this shame for her own duplicity seized her, and she interrupted him, crying—

"I know who you are! I saw it in a book—when I was nursing you."

And with that the curtain was rent.

"*You* nursing me!" he shouted.

Barbara turned right away from him, and, bowing her head, waited for what event the Fates decreed. And she was not kept long in suspense.

A little later, when the twilight was dim enough to cloak a secret flitting, Mrs Muffet came quietly upstairs to learn whether the cab

was still desired, or whether her treachery had averted the calamity of losing "Miss." She listened intently at the door till she caught one faint sound; then she as quietly descended and troubled no more about the cab.

Behind the door, in the same mingling of deep shadows within and rays from the lamp outside which Barbara had stumbled through to answer his knock that first lonely afternoon, were sitting Lesley and his friend Philip. By this time a number of highly important matters had been discussed and several remarkable revelations made. One of these disclosures was indeed strange enough to have astonished a man much less in love; and that was the truth about Barbara and his father. The other revelations, though they vastly surprised the portion of this assembly which was for the moment listening (a duty alternately performed), would perhaps have seemed less amazing to the rest of the world. For instance, Barbara was kept in a long delightful state of thrill as Lesley told her of his unaccountable fondness for Philip Brown and the odd sensations that youth evoked, and how when he met the very image of Philip in the person of his sister, he seemed already prepared for his fate, and fell in love as completely on half an hour's acquaintance as it takes a month at least to make most men.

"But why did you say nothing to Philip about his sister?" asked Barbara.

"I did once."

"I mean—nothing more."

"What could one say to a brother?"

She thought to herself that men were truly baffling creatures. Here had she acted the part of one so well as to escape detection for weeks, and never discovered this absurd reticence.

Then, in low tones, and with a certain reserve on either side, they fell to discussing the author of their past troubles and their present happiness, Mr Thomas Clestran of Pittentrews.

"He has always wished to play the part of Destiny," said Lesley. "And now he has succeeded."

"Do you think he will ever forgive either of us?" she asked.

"Heaven knows. But what does it matter?"

"Oh, I hope some day he will!"

"Aren't we sufficient for each other?"

"Of course! But still——"

"Let us make ourselves independent of everybody, Barbara."

"How?" she asked very shyly, for she guessed what he meant.

"By getting married."

"Some day."

"At once," he said aloud and resolutely.

"Why should we wait? You cannot go on living as Philip Brown. We shan't be rich, but——"

He clapped his hand to his pocket with a start.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, "I'd clean forgotten the letter I came to give you. The book is taken, and here is a cheque for £100. What do you say now?"

Thereupon they celebrated their good fortune in the most fitting way they could think of, and at length Barbara was induced to answer—

"Well, I'll think about it."

CHAPTER XXXV.

AN OPINION UPON THE SYSTEM.

The days passed, and not one word of news came to Mr Clestran from his emissary. At first he was not at all concerned, knowing well the baronet's unpunctual habits, and also being in his own mind determined to think no more of the matter in the meantime. Easier determined than done. In three days he had begun to fidget; his thoughts were ever recurring to his last conversation with his friend; and in a week he came to a sudden impatient decision.

The dog-cart was ordered, and once more he drove over to Fogo House.

In the servant's air who admitted him he seemed to discern a hint of fresh trouble. He had a long uncomfortable wait in the drawing-room, and at last it was Tilly Strynd and not her mother who entered. In her face, too, sharp and composed though it was, he noticed further indications of stormy weather. Her mouth was unusually firm and set, and she pressed her hands into her slim waist with a nervously resolute air.

"My mother hopes you will excuse her from seeing you," she said in her clear, always slightly acid voice. "She has been greatly upset, and has gone to bed."

"I trust nothing serious is the matter," said he, gravely and politely as ever.

"It is only fair to you to tell you exactly what is the matter. Won't you sit down?"

Sitting very upright herself, she continued in the same even, determined tone—

"When my cousin Barbara ran away my mother told you that we were none of us to blame. She thought so at the time, but we have just learned that it was not the case. There is no use in mincing matters, so I may tell you at once that her flight was largely my sister's doing."

"Your sister's! Miss Rose?"

"Yes."

"How did you learn this?"

"My sister, it seems, has been supplying her with money, and not having enough herself, has borrowed from Mrs Kirkaldy in Balnuckie."

"The baker's wife?" exclaimed Mr Clestran with an intonation of aristocratic disgust he could not quite conceal.

"Yes; not having £12,000 a-year, we have been reduced to this extremity," snapped Tilly, whose nerves were in a high-strung state that craved battle and a long death-roll. "This loan was concealed from her husband the baker as long as possible. He has now heard of it, and very properly came to my mother this morning for an explanation. Thereupon Rose confessed everything, and I have now to convey to you her very deep contrition. You will no doubt like to know that she is sufficiently ashamed of herself."

Having thus done what she felt to be no less than her duty in delivering up her sister to punishment, she looked at him with an eye where he might have read a warning to be careful how he used his advantage. Unfortunately he was too deeply moved by these tidings to heed the caution.

"This is a most serious matter," he said with

his sternest frown. "May I ask what induced your sister to act in this way towards me?"

Tilly's voice became more acid than ever.

"My sister is young, and perhaps a little credulous. Women occasionally are both. It appears that you told her of your admiration of her and your disapproval of Barbara with less discretion than I should have expected."

"What! I? I assure you, Miss Strynd——"

"Rose can scarcely have imagined the conversation she repeated to me," interrupted Tilly coolly; and in response to his demand she gave him Rose's version of his words upon the memorable occasion when he had inadvertently stirred her foolish little heart. It was so far from being even probably word-for-word accurate, and placed him in such a surprisingly dissolute light, that even Tilly herself did not believe it to be more than approximately true; but at that distance of time poor Mr Clestran could only protest that whatever he might have said had been strangely misunderstood.

"No doubt you know best what you meant," said Tilly; "but it seems to me a very extraordinary thing that you should have thought it necessary to enlist my sister's sympathy at all—for it seems that was what you were attempting."

"You do not understand me. I hoped that your sister's influence upon Barbara——"

"Might induce Barbara to fall in love with you? Tilly interrupted satirically. She had been so ashamed and exasperated by the discovery of Rose's folly that this opportunity of venting her feelings was too tempting to be lost. Free though she was with her tongue, Mr Clestran's formidable presence and personality had hitherto awed even her, and now that she had him at a disadvantage she resolved to make up for many an irritated silence. While he, shaken and dismayed by this discovery of yet another dismal miscalculation in his schemes, was vainly endeavouring to lay hold of a reasonable answer, she mercilessly continued her attack.

"If *I* was a man I should *first* have tried to make a girl fall in love with me, and *then* have asked her to marry me. Perhaps that is because I don't work upon a system, yet I imagine it is what most men do."

"I must ask you to remember," said Mr Clestran stiffly, "that the circumstances were peculiar."

"Do you mean that so few men want a wife?" asked Tilly. And then, seeing that he had no immediate retort, she went on: "It seems to me that the peculiarity was entirely of your own making."

"Your cousin was extremely young."

"That should have made it all the easier. A

young girl is generally fool enough to fall in love with anybody."

"I did not wish a merely foolish affection."

"It must always come first: you could have taught her sense afterwards. But the idea of beginning with a drill-book! What else could you have expected? You can't break women like dogs."

"Miss Strynd, I did what I thought best."

"Oh, I don't suppose you *knew* any better."

"What, then, could I have done?" asked poor Mr Clestran, who was now frowning down at the carpet and thinking thoughts very foreign to him.

Like a number of unmarried women, Tilly had the most admirable theories of how connubial felicity should be sought and secured, and the opportunity of putting another upon the right track was not to be lost.

"You should have begun by being exceedingly deferential and complaisant, and let her think she could twist you round her finger. Of course she would know that towards the rest of the world you were strong and resolute, and the idea of keeping such a Hercules in a hutch would turn any girl's head. The iron hand should never once have been felt till you were safely married, —and even then it should only have been felt *through* the velvet glove. You need not have

been afraid of getting your own way in the long-run. No woman really likes independence, and it would have been 'What shall I do, dear?' or 'How shall I do it?' all day long."

Instead of getting indignant, as she rather expected, Mr Clestran actually smiled a grave smile.

"You too have your system, I see," he said.

Tilly laughed.

"Mine is founded on common-sense."

To this he made no reply, but, taking out his watch, rose as if to go.

"By the way," he said, "I may mention that I came over in the hope of obtaining some news of your cousin. Do not misunderstand me, however: I have no further intentions in regard to her other than those of a friend to her family. Since I was the innocent cause of her flight, I feel it my duty to see that no further harm comes to her. No doubt you have been surprised at my apparent indifference for the past weeks, but I might explain that if you wish."

"I am only surprised at your troubling your head any further about her," said Tilly candidly.

"You do me an injustice, then. I have even taken steps to procure information."

"What steps?"

"A week ago I commissioned Sir Andrew Dunsappie to go to London——"

"Sir Andrew Dunsappie!" she exclaimed

impatiently. "I don't want to be rude, but really!"

Mr Clestran flushed.

"You do not consider him a proper agent?"

"You might as well have sent his fuddled old butler! But it doesn't matter, as I myself am going straight up to town to bring her back if I can."

"Bring her back here?" he demanded uneasily.

"What else do you propose?"

Under their heavy brows his eyes looked at her with none of their old proud decision. This talking-to had left Thomas Clestran a very subdued and thoughtful man.

"I do not know exactly what to suggest," he admitted; "but it will be exceedingly embarrassing if she comes to Fogo again."

"For you, no doubt," said Tilly. "But I have to consider my cousin."

"May I inquire where she is living at present?" he asked after a pause.

"'Our Lady's Inn' is the address Rose gave me."

"What!" he almost shouted. And then, partially controlling himself, asked in an agitated voice, "Do you know the number?"

"Number 6," said Tilly. She was sufficiently struck by the effect of her first announce-

ment; but when he learned the full address she thought he must be seriously ill.

"What is the matter?" she cried.

"Nothing," he muttered, striding away from her to hide the overwhelming rush of sensations caused by this bewildering piece of news.

In a minute he returned, a little calmer, but still evidently stirred to his depths.

"I shall go to town instead of you, Miss Strynd," he said abruptly.

"*Instead* of me!"

"Pardon me, I do not mean to be rude. Believe me, it is for the best."

"I must have some better reason than that, Mr Clestran."

"You shall know; I shall tell you afterwards. But meantime I beseech of you to trust me and leave this matter in my hands. It may prove to be very—very——"

"Unpleasant?" she asked quickly.

"Possibly."

After her manner she thought swiftly, and answered him in a decisive tone.

"Will you promise not to press her to do anything she doesn't want to do?"

"Yes."

"And you will remember she is a mere child, with no experience and few friends?"

"I shall endeavour to."

"That is not enough. You must."

"I shall."

"And you will send her back here if she wants to come?"

"If you desire it."

"I do. Can I trust you?"

"Certainly."

"And—you won't tell me why you are going?"

"Believe me, Miss Strynd——"

"Very well; I shall let you go then, instead of me, on those conditions. I don't mean to make a fuss about Barbara,—she is a little fool, I'm afraid; but it is my place to look after her, not yours, and I must see that she *is* looked after."

To each condition as it was laid down Mr Clestran had assented with the most surprising meekness, and he now took his departure a perplexed and chastened philosopher.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

SIR ANDREW IS AGAIN SURPRISED.

Without any loss of time Mr Clestran hastened up to town, and early upon a fine and sunny afternoon appeared before a certain respectable house in respectable Jermyn Street. It was here

that Sir Andrew Dunsappie of Ochil conferred upon the landlord the honour of his own and his butler's company, and in an impatient tone Mr Clestran demanded to see the baronet. Unfortunately he was not at home, but his servant might be able to give some information, and accordingly Dougie was summoned from the landlady's parlour, where, over a glass of his native beverage, he had been regaling the family with highly-coloured tales of the splendours of Ochil Castle and the ducal state of their luxurious existence. At the sight of the visitor his jaw dropped, and his face showed such evident signs of perturbation that Mr Clestran's gathering suspicions were instantly intensified.

"When is Sir Andra to be in?" said he. "It's a maist unfortunate thing, Mr Clestran, that he should have gane to the country on this day of a' others. No, I'm feared he'll not be home till late; but if ye'd leave an address, sir, I'll tell him ye called."

Mr Clestran's hawk eyes searched his blotched countenance as though they would burn a hole through into his mind. Yet in spite of his close cross-questioning, Dougie held stoutly to his story.

"What for should I be saying Sir Andra was not to be in if he was to be? A gentleman like you, Mr Clestran——"

"That has nothing to do with the matter," said Mr Clestran sternly.

"Weel, as ye please, sir; it certainly doesna seem to make much odds by the way ye're dooting ma word. And the long and the short of it is that Sir Andra is no' to be in afore eleven at night."

Unfortunately for the reputation of Dougie, the door opened at that very moment, and with a burst of 'Tra la, la, la!' in a jovial voice, Sir Andrew himself entered. But at the sight of his old friend his face fell as lamentably as his servant's, and his song died instantly away.

"Clestran, by Jove!" he exclaimed.

Mr Clestran eyed him up and down in severe silence. There was no doubt that the baronet had been entertaining himself well that afternoon. Besides being in hilarious and bubbling-over spirits, which his friend immediately associated with his leading weakness, he was dressed even more splendidly than on the last occasion we saw him in town. A waistcoat of the palest blue and most recent design contrasted pleasantly with the ancient canary trousers and enhanced the twenty-year-old glories of the lavender tie, while his frock-coat was royally adorned by an unusually large button-hole of white orchid and maiden-hair fern. In fact,

to describe him as festive-looking would be a feeble understatement.

Endeavouring to make his manner match his appearance, he asked his visitor with forced cheerfulness to come into his sitting-room, and there, perspiring visibly, awaited his examination.

"I wish to Heaven I was spending my own money," he reflected. "That's the mischief of it! It gives Clestran such an awkward pull."

"In the first place, are you in a condition to understand my questions?" his visitor began.

"Condition? What d'ye mean?" said Sir Andrew, becoming very flushed.

"I mean that I wish explicit answers. Have you seen Miss Cheyne?"

"Yes, I have," replied Dunsappie, with a resolute air intended to convey the fact that he scorned to tell an untruth.

"And you have seen Lesley?"

"Yes."

"They are living together?"

Dunsappie started.

"Er—living together?"

"Yes."

"Why do you suppose so?"

"I may tell you at once—to save you from unnecessary prevarication—that I know Miss Cheyne is living at the same address as my son. I therefore conclude that they are living

together. Is that so? Remember I can easily find out for myself."

"My dear Clestran," said Dunsappie earnestly, "let me cic—caution you against coming to uncharitable conclusions."

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed Mr Clestran. "Do you suppose I have come all the way to London to hear you lecture on charity? Tell me the whole truth."

Dunsappie's wits were clearer than his friend gave them credit for being. His most saving virtue was always his pawkiness, and after a moment's reflection he began an extremely guarded account of Barbara's chance coming to the Inn, and her innocent acquaintance with Lesley.

"Do you mean to tell me," interrupted Clestran, "that she came to Our Lady's Inn by mere accident?"

"My dear fellow, you drove her there yourself. She passed you in the Strand, and in her fright ran into the nearest quiet refuge."

Mr Clestran was struck dumb by the new instance of the perverse workings of destiny, and suffered him to continue his story to the end.

"They each know who the other is now, I gather," he said at last.

"Yes—oh yes, I suppose they do."

"Suppose? Be candid, Dunsappie."

“My dear chap——” began Sir Andrew in some embarrassment.

He got no farther, for as he wrestled with the problem he took out his handkerchief to mop his brow, and, behold, a little shower of rice fell upon the carpet.

“What!” exclaimed Mr Clestran, “have you been married?”

“*I!* Lord, no—ha, ha! I’ve been at a wedding to-day, that’s all.”

“Whose?”

Dunsappie hesitated for an instant, and Mr Clestran sprang to his feet.

“*Theirs?*” he demanded.

“My dear Clestran,” said Dunsappie with effusive candour, “I was coming to that—in time, you know. Yes, it was their wedding.”

Mr Clestran slowly sat down again, and a silence ensued.

At last he said in his most deliberate tone—

“I do not wish to go into your conduct in this matter, Dunsappie. We all of us make mistakes, and as I myself have contributed my share, the less said the better. At the same time, you must understand that I shall continue to use my own judgment and to be guided by my own experience. It has lately been enlarged, I admit, and I propose to be guided not only by my long-established principles—which, mind

you, I see no reason to depart from—but also by any conclusions I may have drawn from recent events.”

“You are perfectly right,” said Dunsappie with a great air of conviction, though what was to follow he had not the least idea.

“You will further admit,” pursued Mr Clestran, “that I have received considerable provocation from both the parties in question.”

“Rather!” said Dunsappie. “A less fair man would be deuced tempted to be angry with ’em.”

“I *am* angry, but, as I say, reasonably angry. You see the distinction I would make?”

“Perfectly.”

Mr Clestran reflected, and then asked—

“What money have they to live upon?”

“Only what he earns.”

“And how much is that?”

“Deuced little, I fancy. At the same time, he is making an excellent start with his pen, you know.”

“And do you, as a man of literary judgment, consider he has a fair prospect of success?”

“He’s uncommon clever,” said the baronet, “writes excellently, and all that, but he will have to get rid of some of his nonsense. A

journalist mustn't feel above his work and be too much of the gentleman, don't you know."

"H'm," said Mr Clestran. "I do not consider a little self-respect is a bad thing, even in literature. Indeed I am glad to hear that Lesley has not entirely forgotten his traditions, however much he may have disregarded them. That is the best thing I have yet heard about him."

"Oh," said Sir Andrew, immediately taking up this cue, "Lesley hasn't let himself down farther than he can help: he's devilish proud of you and his family and everything, don't you know. Only he can't make enough at pure literature at present, and has to take what work he can get."

"Journalism, you said just now?" said Mr Clestran with a strong intonation of contempt.

"My dear Clestran, the boy must live."

Mr Clestran put a number of other inquiries about the young couple without giving, on his side, any hint of how he intended to behave towards them. The two chief points that exercised Dunsappie's amiable mind were, whether he meant to assist them at present, and whether he still wished to break the entail; but not a ray of light was thrown on either. Finally he fell into a deep reverie, which ended by his

starting up and asking where they were at present to be found.

"They will stay in the Inn till to-morrow, I believe."

"Then," said Mr Clestran with decision, "I shall go and see them at once."

"What!" exclaimed Dunsappie. "Go and interrupt a young couple a few hours after the parson has made 'em one? My dear fellow, think of it!"

"They have shown no such consideration towards me that I should consult their convenience."

"But it might be deuced awkward."

"Perhaps, then, you had better come with me and give them a few minutes' notice."

"I!" exclaimed the baronet.

"Certainly. Why not?"

"That might be just as awkward."

"Had you thought of that before you encouraged them in this rash marriage it might have been more to the point. As it is, I do not wish to remain in town any longer than I can help, and *I* propose to see them now. Will you come?"

With a sigh the obedient baronet rose and put on his wedding-hat again, and the two set out forthwith. They drove straight to the Inn and alighted at Number 6. Going up the

stair they passed a very stout and smiling woman.

"Who is that?" asked Mr Clestran, who was always observant and curious for information on all subjects.

"That is Mrs Muffet, the woman who looks after them both."

Mr Clestran stopped, and called her to him with his stateliest air.

"I hear that you are my son's servant," said he.

"Wot, Mr Lesley's, sir?" gasped Mrs Muffet, who had lately heard something about a terrible and disinheriting father, and had now a vague terror of approaching calamity upon thus suddenly confronting him in the flesh.

"Yes, my good woman; and since he is possibly not in a position to supplement your wages even upon a special occasion, I must ask you to accept this from me," and thereupon he handed her two sovereigns, and continued his ascent without waiting for her confusion of thanks and exclamations.

"I should not like the representative of my family ever to feel that he had been ungenerous to dependants," he explained. "Kindly inform Lesley that she has now been sufficiently rewarded."

Dunsappie knew not whether to be more entertained by this curious exhibition of family

pride or relieved by its implication that Lesley was still to be regarded as his heir.

“And now,” said Mr Clestran, “if you will inform them of my coming I shall remain for a moment outside upon the landing.”

CHAPTER XXXVII.

MR CLESTRAN AS PROVIDENCE.

It was in the panelled sitting-room, still rented in the name of Philip Brown, that Mr Clestran found his son and daughter-in-law. The course of their love had been secret and swift. Rashly and impetuously rushing upon their fate, they had married before there was time for intervention or discovery. After a quiet wedding they had driven back to their rooms in an ordinary hansom, to stay there till the next day, and then depart from the old Inn for ever. It was Lesley's suggestion that they should begin their wedded life with one night beneath the roof that had harboured them both in their season of trouble and guarded their romance so benignantly, and Barbara was in that state of mind when if he had proposed a journey to the moon she would have assented

blithely. Since their return they had been talking it matters not of what, when like a thunderclap came Sir Andrew with his announcement.

When Mr Clestran entered they both stood in visible embarrassment how he might wish to be received, but without heeding this he gravely shook hands with them both and said—

“I wish you happiness.”

Then turning to Dunsappie he assured him that he need not leave the room, as what he had to say would be brief and quite fitting for such an old mutual friend to hear. Indeed it is quite possible he considered the dignified part he had determined to play was worthy of an even larger audience.

“I need not tell you,” he began, addressing himself to Lesley, “that I have not come here to congratulate you upon your prudence and circumspection, or upon your regard for my feelings. You are not relying on my countenance or assistance, I presume?”

“I am not,” said Lesley firmly.

“That, at least, is honestly said; and I am glad to see you have learned that when I say a thing I mean it. I told you I could countenance your conduct no longer, and thenceforth I ceased to do so.”

He paused to give effect to this stalwart

declaration, and then, having so far satisfied the requirements of his pride, continued in a more gracious tone—

“At the same time, if your conduct manifestly and consistently improves, I, in strict accordance with my expressed—or at any rate understood—intentions, may, or I may say shall, be disposed to reconsider my attitude towards you.”

“Thank you,” said Lesley.

“I shall be the more willing to alter my attitude for the sake of the wife you have chosen.” (Here he bowed slightly towards the astonished Barbara.) “As for your profession, it is one not unbecoming a gentleman, provided it is followed in a proper and worthy spirit. You propose to follow it in that spirit, I hope.”

“To the best of my ability,” answered Lesley.

“Till you have proved your ability I must leave you to make your own way, for I do not intend to support a penny-a-liner or any person of that description.”

Having thus precisely expressed his desires he turned to Barbara, and with a grave and courteous smile said—

“Barbara, hitherto we have misunderstood each other,—I mean, that you have misunder-

stood me as much as I have you. I hope I shall now make myself clearer when I tell you that I shall settle £300 a-year upon you."

"Well done, Clestran!" exclaimed Dunsappie, and in his delight grimaced gleefully and repeatedly at the young couple.

"On me?" cried Barbara. "Oh, you are far too kind!"

Mr Clestran was visibly gratified at her pleasure, and his air still further relaxed.

"Till your husband is capable of supporting himself in comfort I have no objection to your assisting him out of this sum. Indeed, rather than permit him to sink into the ruts of journalism I should even counsel this course. Remember that if he behaves himself he will one day be the representative of a hitherto honourable and respectable house. Do not permit him to 'pot-boil' or anything of that nature. At the same time make him work, worthily and hard. My ultimate forgiveness depends upon that."

Though he addressed her with an intonation of kindness, and even of humour, it was clear that he meant his graceless son to take these words to heart, and Barbara thanked him again with no levity in her tone. Then bidding them farewell, he motioned in his imperious way to

the smiling baronet to follow him, and left Barbara and Lesley to their thoughts and their happiness.

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Little more remains to be said. For the next few years Mr and Mrs Lesley Clestran had a tough but exhilarating struggle to keep both ends comfortably meeting. In this, however, they were sustained by the growing interest of Mr Clestran senior, who, always a keen reader, now took the greatest pains to systemise his theories on literature, and finally bethought him of despatching them in large envelopes (of a new waterproof parchment with specially adhesive gum) for his son's edification and advancement. From this correspondence ensued a visit of the author and his wife to Pittentrews, and at last, when Lesley's name could be quoted with pride, came a complete reconciliation.

Sir Andrew Dunsappie and his faithful Dougie still contentedly inhabit Ochil Castle. As for the Strynds, Rose made a most romantic marriage with a subaltern in a Highland regiment, and has since been very pleased to accept anything else that was offered her ; while her mother and Tilly lead as amicable a life together as could reasonably be expected. Of the old Inn alone I can write but a sad epilogue. That

ancient haven which had sheltered so many generations, and ought to have survived for centuries after all these human characters were dead and gone, was the first to perish. In the name of "improvement" it was doomed, and now no brick rests upon another. Panelled rooms, lazy pigeons, porters,—all have gone; and the tide of London surges where Our Lady's Inn once reposed.

THE END.